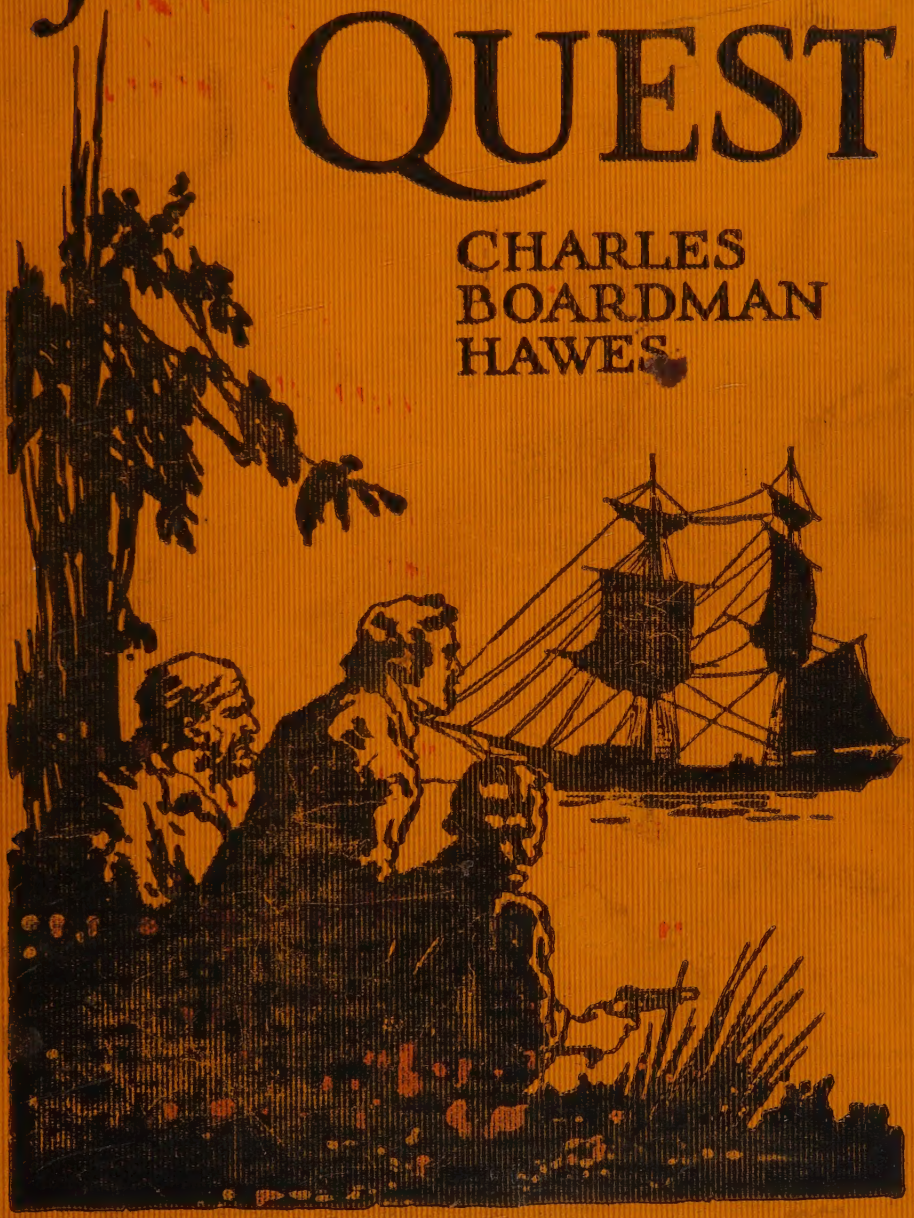
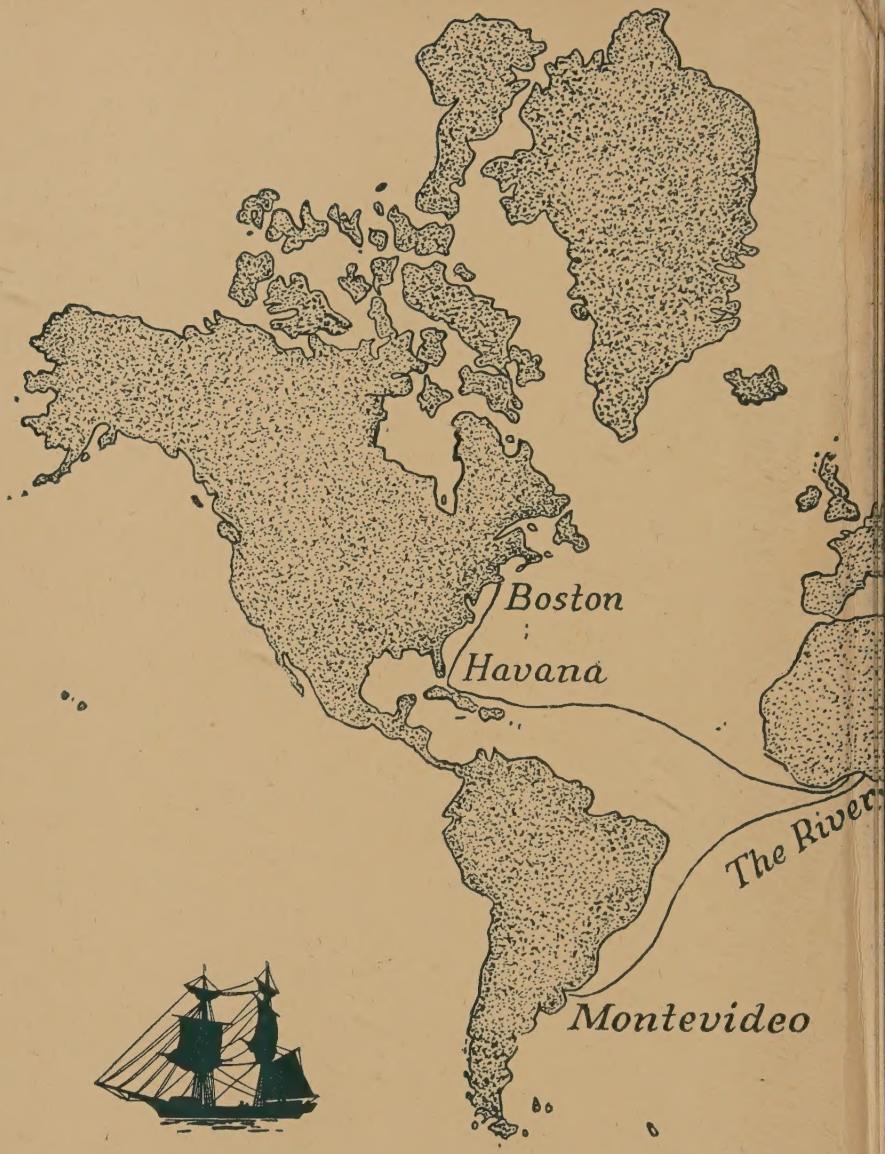
The GREAT QUEST

CHARLES BOARDMAN HAWES





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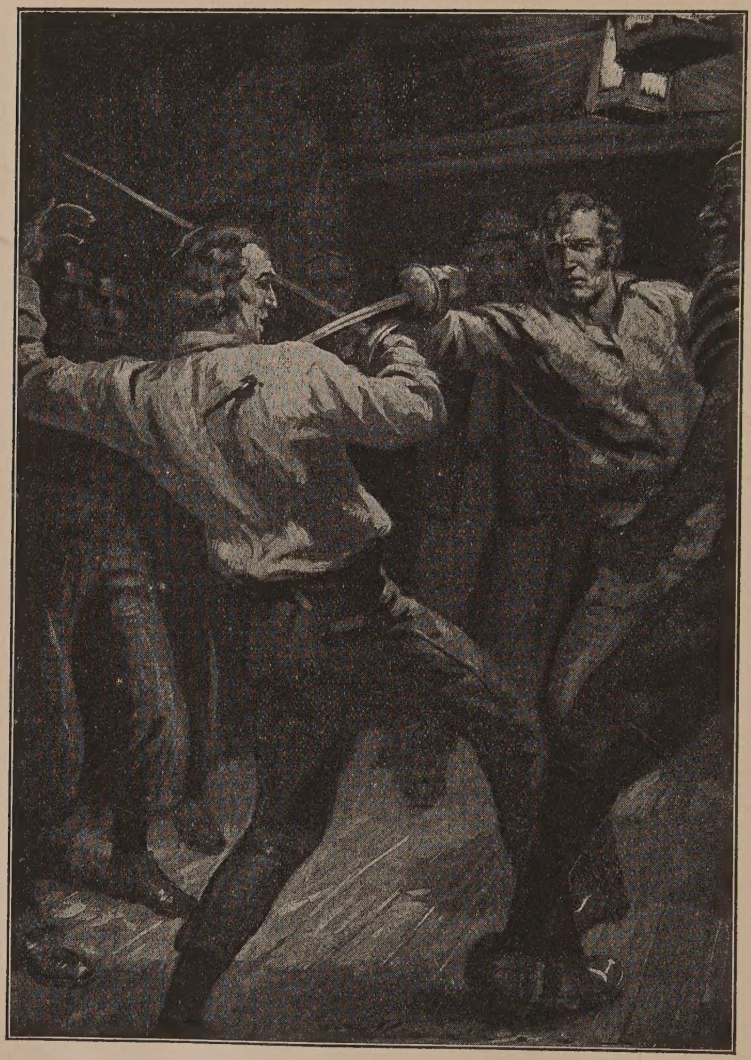

I gave a quick jerk,—literally my foot was held,—I lost my balance and all but went over.

THE GREAT QUEST

A romance of 1826, wherein are recorded the experiences of Josiah Woods of Topham, and of those others with whom he sailed for Cuba and the Gulf of Guinea.

By

CHARLES BOARDMAN HAWES

Author of "The Mutineers"

Illustrated by

GEORGE VARIAN

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To

MY FATHER AND MOTHER

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I

OLD ACQUAINTANCE

THE GREAT QUEST

CHAPTER I

THE STRANGER

One morning early in the summer of 1826, I brushed the sweat from my forehead and the flour from my clothes, unrolled my shirt-sleeves to my wrists, donned my coat, and, with never a suspicion that that day was to be unlike any other, calmly walked out into the slanting sunshine. Rain had fallen in the night, and the air was still fresh and cool. Although the clock had but just struck six, I had been at work an hour, and now that my uncle, Seth Upham, had come down to take charge of the store, I was glad that some business discussed the evening before gave me an excuse to go on an errand to the other end of the village.

Uncle Seth looked up from his ledger as I passed. "You are prompt to go," said he. "I've scarce got my hat on the peg. Well, the sooner the better, I suppose. Young Mackay's last shipment of oil was of poor quality and color. The rascal needs a good wigging, but the best you can do is tell the old man my opinion of his son's goods. If he gets a notion that we're likely to go down to nine cents a gallon on the next lot, he'll bring the boy to taw, I'll warrant you. Well, be gone. The sooner you go, the sooner you'll come, and we're like to have a busy day."

I nodded and went down the steps, but turned again and looked back. As Uncle Seth sat at his desk just inside the door, his bald head showing above the ledgers,

he made me think of a pigeon-holed document concerned with matters of trade — weights and measures, and dollars and cents. He was a brisk, abrupt little man, with keen eyes and a thin mouth, and lines that cut at sharp angles into his forehead and drew testy curves around his chin; and in his way he was prominent in the village. Though ours was a community of Yankees, he had the reputation, in which he took great pride, of being an uncommonly sharp hand at a bargain. That it could be a doubtful compliment, he never suspected.

He owned property in three towns besides our own village of Topham; he kept a very considerable balance in a Boston bank; he loaned money at interest from one end of the county to the other, and he held shares in two schooners and a bark — not to mention the bustling general store that was the keystone of his prosperity.

If anyone had presumed so far as to suggest that a close bargain could be aught but creditable, Uncle Seth would have shot a testy glance at him, with some such comment as, "Pooh! He's drunk or crazy!" And he would then have atoned for any little trickery by his generosity, come Sunday, when the offering was taken at church.

There were, to be sure, those who said, by allusion or implication, that he would beat the devil at his own game, for all his pains to appear so downright honest. But they were ne'er-do-weels and village scoundrels, whom Uncle Seth, although he was said to have known them well enough in early youth, passed without deigning to give them so much as a nod; and of course no one believed the word of such as they.

For my own part, I had only friendly feelings toward him, for he was always a decent man, and since my mother died, his odd bursts of generosity had touched

me not a little. Grumpy old Uncle Seth! Others might call him "nigh," but for all his abrupt manner, he was kind to me after a queer, short fashion, and many a bank-note had whisked from his pocket to mine at moments when a stranger would have thought him in furious temper.

Turning on my heel, I left him busy at his desk amid his barrels and cans and kegs and boxes, and unwittingly set forth to meet the beginning of the wildest, maddest adventure that I ever heard of outside the pages of fiction.

As I went down past the church, the parsonage, and the smithy,— the little group of buildings that, together with our general store, formed the hub on which the life of the country for many miles thereabouts revolved, — I was surprised to see no one astir. Few country people then were — or now are — so shameless as to lie in bed at six o'clock of a summer morning.

By rights I should have heard the clank of metal, the hum of voices, men calling to their horses, saws whining through wood, and hammers driving nails. But there was no sound of speech or labor; the nail-kegs on which our village worthies habitually reposed during long intervals of the working day were unoccupied; the fire in the blacksmith's forge, for want of blowing, had died down to a dull deep red. Three horses were tugging at their halters inside the smithy, and a well-fed team was waiting outside by a heavy cart; yet no one was anywhere to be seen.

Perceiving all this from a distance, I was frankly puzzled; and as I approached, I cast about with lively curiosity to see what could cause so strange a state of affairs. It was only when I had gone past the smithy, that I saw the smith and his customers and his habitual guests gath-

ered on the other side of the building, where I had not been able to see them before. They were staring at the old village tavern, which stood some distance away on a gentle rise of land.

My curiosity so prevailed over my sense of duty that I turned from the road through the tall grass, temporarily abandoning my errand, and picked my way among some old wheels and scrap iron to join the men.

Their talk only aggravated my wonder.

Clearing his throat, the smith gruffly muttered, "It does act like him, and yet I can't believe it'll be him."

"Why should n't he come back?" one of the farmers asked in a louder voice. "Things done twenty years ago will never be dragged up to face him, and he'd know that."

The smith grunted. "Where would Neil Gleazen find the money to buy a suit of good clothes and a beaver hat?"

"That's easy answered," a third speaker put in. And they all exchanged significant glances.

In the silence that followed I made bold to put a question for myself. "Of whom are you talking?" I asked.

They looked closely at me and again exchanged glances.

"There's someone up yonder at the inn, Joe," the smith said kindly; "and Ben, here, getting sight of him last night and again this morning, has took a notion that it's a fellow who used to live here years ago and who left town — well, in a hurry. As to that, I can't be sure, but I vum, I'd not be surprised if it was Neil Gleazen after all."

I now discerned in one of the rocking-chairs on the porch the figure of a stranger, well dressed so far as we could see at that distance, who wore a big beaver hat set rakishly a trifle forward. He had thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, and as he leaned back, with his feet raised against one of the columns that supported

the porch-roof, he sent clouds of white cigar-smoke eddying up and away.

The others were so intent on their random speculations that, when I asked more about who and what Neil Gleazen was, they ignored my question, and continued to exchange observations in low voices.

I could hear little of their talk without forcing myself into their very midst, and of what little I heard I made still less, for it was full of unfamiliar names and reminiscences that meant nothing to me.

When some one spoke of Seth Upham, my mother's brother, I was all ears on the instant; but I saw the smith glance at me, and probably he nudged the speaker, for, after a moment's pause, they went on about indifferent matters. I then perceived that I was unlikely to learn more, so I returned to the road and continued on my way.

As I passed the tavern I took occasion to see what I could, in courtesy, of the stranger; but he looked so hard at me while I was passing that I could steal only glances at him, unless I gave him stare for stare, which I did not wish to do. So I got only a brief glimpse of tall hat, bold dark eyes under bushy brows, big nose, smooth-shaven chin, and smiling mouth, all of which a heavy stock and voluminous coat seemed to support. I thought that I caught the flash of a jeweled pin in the man's stock and of a ring on his finger, but of that I was not sure until later. Pushing on, I left him in the old inn chair, as proud as a sultan, puffing clouds of white smoke from a long cigar and surveying the village as grandly as if he owned it, while I went about my uncle's business at the other end of the town.

But when I had gone far on my way, his dark face and arrogant manner were still in my mind. While I was arguing with surly old Dan Mackay about whale-oil and

horses and sugar and lumber, I was thinking of those proud, keen eyes and that smiling, scornful mouth; while I was bargaining with Mrs. Mackay for eggs and early peas, I was thinking of the beaver that the man had worn and the big ring on his finger; and while I was walking back over two miles of country road, on which the sun was now pouring down with ever-increasing heat, I was thinking of how my uncle's name had popped out in the conversation beside the smithy — and how it had popped, so to speak, discreetly back again.

I was all eagerness, now, for another and better look at the stranger, and was resolved to stare him out of countenance, if need be, to get it. Imagine, then, my disappointment when, hot and sweaty, I once more came in sight of the tavern and saw the unmistakable figure under the beaver hat walk jauntily down the steps, pause a moment in the road, and, turning in the opposite direction, go rapidly away from me.

The stranger should not escape me like that, I thought with a grim chuckle; and warm though I was, I lengthened my stride and drew slowly up on him.

As he passed the smithy, he looked to neither right nor left, yet I was by no means sure that he did not see the curious faces that filled the door when he went by. A man can see so much without turning his head!

While I toiled on after him, trying to appear indifferent and yet striving to overtake him before he should go beyond the store, where I must turn in, would I or would I not, he passed the church, the parsonage, and the schoolhouse. He wore his hat tilted forward at just such an angle, and to one side over his right eye; swinging his walking-stick nonchalantly, he clipped the blossoms off the buttercups as he passed them; now he paused to light a fresh cigar from the butt of the one that he was smoking;

now he lingered a moment in the shade of an old chestnut tree. All the time I was gaining on him; but now the store was hard by.

Should I keep on until I had passed him and, turning back, could meet him face to face? No, Uncle Seth would surely stop me. In my determination to get a good look at the man, I was about to break into a run, when, to my amazement, he turned to the left toward the very place where I was going.

So close to him had I now come that, when he stood on the threshold, I was setting foot on the lower step. I could see Uncle Seth's clerks, Arnold Lamont, a Frenchman, and Simeon Muzzy, busily at work in the back room. I could see, as before, Uncle Seth's bald head shining above the top of his desk. But my eyes were all for the stranger, and I now saw plainly that in the ring on his finger there flashed a great white diamond.

Uncle Seth, hearing our steps, raised his head. "Well?" he said sharply, in the dictatorial way that was so characteristic of him.

"Well!" repeated the stranger in a voice that startled me. It was deep and gruff, and into the monosyllable the man put a solid, heavy emphasis, which made my uncle's sharpness seem as light as a woman's burst of temper.

Uncle Seth, too, was startled, I think, for he raised his head and irritably peered over the steel rims of his spectacles. "Well," he grumpily responded, "what do you want of me?"

"An hour of your time," said the stranger, lowering his voice.

"Time's money," returned my uncle.

"I'm the lad to transmute it into fine gold for you, Seth Upham," said the stranger.

"How do you know my name?"

"That's a foolish question to ask. Everyone in town can tell a stranger the name of the man who keeps the village store."

My uncle grunted irritably, and brushed his chin with the feather of his quill.

"Come," said the stranger, "where's a chair?"

"Them that come to this store to loaf," my uncle cried, "generally sit on cracker-boxes. I'm a busy man."

He was still looking closely at the stranger, but his voice indicated that, after all, it might not be so hard to mollify him.

"Well, I ain't proud," the stranger said with a conciliatory gesture, but without the faintest flicker of a smile. "It won't be the first time I've set on a cracker-box and talked to Seth Upham. I mind a time once when old Parker used to keep the store, and me and you had stole our hats full of crackers, which we ate in the little old camp over by the river."

"Who," cried Uncle Seth, "who in heaven's name are you?"

He was pale to the very summit of his bald head; unconscious of what he was doing, he had thrust his pen down on the open ledger, where it left a great blotch of wet ink.

"Hgh! You've got no great memory for old friends, have you, Seth? You're rich now, I hear. Money-bags full of gold. Well, 'time's money,' you said. You're going to put in a golden hour with me this day."

Uncle Seth got up and laid a trembling hand on the back of his desk. "Neil Gleazen! Cornelius Gleazen!" he gasped.

The stranger pushed his beaver back on his head, and with the finger on which the diamond sparkled flicked the

ash from his cigar. "It's me, Seth," he returned; and for the first time since I had seen him he laughed a deep, hearty laugh.

"Well, what'll you have?" Uncle Seth demanded hotly. "I'm an honest man. I'm a deacon in the church. My business is an honest business. There's nothing here for you, Neil! What do you want?"

In spite of his apparent anger,— or because of it,— Uncle Seth's voice trembled.

"Well, what do you mean by all this talk of an honest man? Ain't I an honest man?"

"Why — why — "

"Hgh! You've not got much to say to that, have you?"

"I — why — I don't — know — "

"Of course you don't know. You don't know an honest man when you see one. Don't talk to me like that, Seth Upham. You and me has robbed too many churches together when we was boys to have you talk like that now. You and me — "

"For heaven's sake keep still!" Uncle Seth cried. "Customers are coming."

Neil Gleazen grunted again. Pushing a cracker-box into the corner behind Uncle Seth's desk and placing his beaver on it, he settled back in Uncle Seth's own chair, with a cool impudent wink at me, as if for a long stay, while Uncle Seth, with an eagerness quite unlike his usual abrupt, scornful manner, rushed away from his unwelcome guest and proceeded to make himself surprisingly agreeable to a pair of country women who wished to barter butter for cotton cloth.

CHAPTER II

MY UNCLE BEHAVES QUEERLY

The village of Topham, to which, after an absence of twenty years, Cornelius Gleazen had returned as a stranger, lay near the sea and yet not beside it, near the post road and yet not upon it. From the lower branches of an old pine that used to stand on the hill behind the tavern we could see a thread of salt water, which gleamed like silver in the sun; and, on the clearest days, if we climbed higher, we could sometimes catch a glimpse of tiny ships working up or down the coast.

In the other direction, if we faced about, we could see, far down a long, broad valley, between low hills, a bit of white road that ran for a mile or two between meadows and marshes; and on the road we sometimes saw moving black dots trailing tiny clouds of dust, which we knew were men and horses and coaches.

In Topham I was born, and there I spent my boyhood. I suppose that I was quieter than the average boy and more studious, for I was content to find adventures in the pages of books, and I read from cover to cover all the journals of the day that came to hand. Certainly I was a dreamy lad, who knew books better than men, and who cared so little for "practical affairs" that much passed me by unnoticed which many another youth of no more native keenness would instantly have perceived.

When my mother, some years after my father's death, came to live with her brother and keep his house for him, it did not make so great a change in my manner of life as one might have expected. Bustling, smart Uncle Seth

ruled the household with a quick, nervous hand; and for the time, as he bent all his energies to the various projects in which he was interested and in which he was more than ordinarily successful, he almost ignored his nephew.

It was not strange that after my mother died Uncle Seth should give me more thought, for he was left a second time alone in the world, and except for me he had neither close friend nor blood relation. I think that his very shrewdness, which must have shown him how much a man needs friends, perversely kept him from making them; it built around him a fence of cold, calculating, selfish appraisal that repelled most people whom he might have drawn closer to him. But to me, who had on him claims of a kind, and whom he had come by slow stages to know intimately, he gave a queer, testy, impulsive affection; and although the first well-meant but ill-chosen act by which he manifested it was to withdraw me from my books to the store, where he set me to learn the business, for which I was by no means so grateful as I should have been, both I and his two clerks, Sim Muzzy and Arnold Lamont, to whom long association had revealed the spontaneous generosity of which he seemed actually to be ashamed, had a very real affection for him.

It was no secret that he intended to make me his heir, and I was regarded through the town as a young man of rare prospects, which reconciled me in a measure to exchanging during the day my worn volumes of Goldsmith and Defoe for neat columns that represented profit and loss on candles and sugar and spice; and my hard, faithful work won Uncle Seth's confidence, and with it a curiously grudging acknowledgment. Thus our little world of business moved monotonously, though not unpleasantly, round and round the cycle of the seasons, until the day when Cornelius Gleazen came back to his native town.

He continued to sit in my uncle's chair, that first morning, while Uncle Seth, perspiring, it seemed to me, more freely than the heat of the day could have occasioned, bustled about and waited on his customers. I suppose that Neil Gleazen really saw nothing out of the ordinary in Uncle Seth's manner; but to me, who knew him so well now, it was plain that, instead of trying to get the troublesome women and their little business of eggs and cloth done with and out of the store as quickly as possible, which under the circumstances was what I should have expected of him, he was trying by every means in his power to prolong their bartering. And whether or not Neil Gleazen suspected this, with imperturbable assurance he watched Uncle Seth pass from one end of the store to the other.

When at last the women went away and Uncle Seth returned to his desk, Gleazen removed the beaver from the cracker-box, and blowing a ring of smoke out across the top of the desk, watched the draft from the door tear it into thin blue shreds. "Sit down," he said calmly.

I was already staring at them in amazement; but my amazement was fourfold when Uncle Seth hesitated, gulped, and *seated himself on the cracker-box.*

"Joe," he said in an odd voice, "go help Arnold and Sim in the back shop."

So I went out and left them; and when I came back, Cornelius Gleazen was gone. But the next day he came again, and the next, and the next.

That he was the very man the smith and his cronies had thought him, I learned beyond peradventure of a doubt. Strange tales were whispered here and there about the village, and women covertly turned their eyes to watch him when he passed. Some men who had known him in the old days tried to conceal it, and pretended to

be ignorant of all that concerned him, and gave him the coldest of cold stares when they chanced to meet him face to face. Others, on the contrary, courted his attention and called on him at the tavern, and went away, red with anger, when he coldly snubbed them.

At the time it seemed to make little difference to him what they thought. Strangely enough, the Cornelius Gleazen who had come back to his boyhood home was a very different Cornelius, people found, from the one who, twenty years before, had gone away by night with the town officers hot on his trail.

Strange stories of that wild night passed about the town, and I learned, in one way and another, that Gleazen was not the only lad who had then disappeared. There was talk of one Eli Norton, and of foul play, and an ugly word was whispered. But it had all happened long before, much had been forgotten, and some things had never come to light, and the officers who had run Gleazen out of town were long since dead. So, as the farmer by the smithy had said would be the case, the old scandals were let lie, and Gleazen went his way unmolested.

That my uncle would gladly have been rid of the fellow, for all his grand airs and the pocketfuls of money that he would throw out on the bar at the inn or on the counter at the store, I very well knew; I sometimes saw him wince at Gleazen's effrontery, or start to retort with his customary sharpness, and then go red or pale and press his lips to a straight line. Yet I could not imagine why this should be. If any other man had treated him so, Uncle Seth would have turned on him with the sharpest words at his command.

It was not like him to sit meekly down to another's arrogance. He had been too long a leading man in our community. But Cornelius Gleazen seemed to have cast

a spell upon him. The longer Gleazen would sit and watch Uncle Seth, the more overbearing would his manner become and the more nervous would Uncle Seth grow.

I then believed, and still do, that if my uncle had stood up to him, as man to man, on that first day, Neil Gleazen would have pursued a very different course. But Uncle Seth, if he realized it at all, realized it too late.

At the end of a week Gleazen seemed to have become a part of the store. He would frown and look away out of the window, and scarcely deign to reply if any of the poorer or less reputable villagers spoke to him, whether their greeting was casual or pretentious; but he would nod affably, and proffer cigars, and exchange observations on politics and affairs of the world, when the minister or the doctor or any other of the solid, substantial men of the place came in.

I sometimes saw Uncle Seth surreptitiously watching him with a sort of blank wonder; and once, when we had come home together late at night, he broke a silence of a good two hours by remarking as casually as if we had talked of nothing else all the evening, "I declare to goodness, Joe, it does seem as if Neil Gleazen had reformed. I could almost take my oath he's not spoken to one of the old crowd since he returned. Who would have thought it? It's strange — passing strange."

It was the question that the whole town was asking — who would have thought it? I had heard enough by now of the old escapades,— drunken revels in the tavern, raids on a score of chicken-roosts and gardens, arrant burglary, and even, some said, arson,— to understand why they asked the question. But more remarkable by far to me was the change that had come over my uncle. Never before had the business of the store been better; never

before had there been more mortgages and notes locked up in the big safe; never had our affairs of every description flourished so famously. But whereas, in other seasons of greater than ordinary prosperity, Uncle Seth had become almost genial, I had never seen him so dictatorial and testy as now. Some secret fear seemed to haunt him from day to day and from week to week.

Thinking back on that morning when Cornelius Gleazen first came to our store, I remembered a certain sentence he had spoken. "You and me has robbed too many churches together when we was boys —" I wondered if I could not put my finger on the secret of the change that had come over my uncle.

CHAPTER III

HIGGLEBY'S BARN

That Cornelius Gleazen had returned to Topham a reformed and honest man, the less skeptical people in the village now freely asserted. To be sure, some said that no good could come from any man who wore a diamond on his finger, to say nothing of another in his stock, and the minister held aloof for reasons known only to himself. But there was something hearty and wholesome in Gleazen's gruff voice and blunt, kindly wit that quite turned aside the shafts of criticism, particularly when he had made it plain that he would associate only with people of unquestioned respectability; and his devout air, as he sat in the very front pew in church and sang the hymns in a fine, reverberating bass, almost — although never quite — won over even the minister. All were agreed that you could pardon much in a man who had lived long in foreign parts; and if any other argument were needed, Gleazen's own free-handed generosity for every good cause provided it.

There were even murmurs that a man with Seth Upham's money might well learn a lesson from the stranger within our gates, which came to my uncle's ears, by way of those good people you can find in every town who feel it incumbent on them to repeat in confidence that which they have gained in confidence, and caused him no little uneasiness.

Of the probity of Cornelius Gleazen the village came gradually to have few doubts; and those of us who believed in the man were inclined to belittle the black-

smith, who persisted in thinking ill of him, and even the minister. Unquestionably Gleazen had seen the error of his youthful ways and had profited by the view, which, by all accounts, must have been extensive.

It was a fine thing to see him sitting on the tavern porch or in my uncle's store and discoursing on the news of the day. By a gesture, he would dispose of the riots in England and leave us marveling at his keenness. The riots held a prominent place in the papers, and we argued that a man who could so readily place them where they belonged must have a head of no mean order. Of affairs in South America, where General Paez had become Civil and Military Dictator of Venezuela, he had more to say; for General Paez, it seemed, was a friend of his. I have wondered since about his boasted friendship with the distinguished general, but at the time he convinced us that Venezuela was a fortunate state and that her affairs were much more important to men of the world than a bill to provide for the support of aged survivors of the Army of the Revolution, which a persistent one-legged old chap from the Four Corners tried a number of times to introduce into the conversation.

There came a day when both the doctor and the minister joined the circle around Cornelius Gleazen. Never was there prouder man! He fairly expanded in the warmth of their interest. His gestures were more impressive than ever before; his voice was more assertive. Yet behind it all I perceived a curious twinkle in his eyes, and I got a perverse impression that even then the man was laughing up his sleeve. This did not in itself set my mind on new thoughts; but to add to my curiosity, when the doctor and the minister were leaving, I saw that they were talking in undertones and smiling significantly.

Late one night toward the end of that week, I was returning from Boston, whither I had gone to buy ten pipes of Schiedam gin and six of Old East India Madeira, which a correspondent of my uncle's had lately imported. An acquaintance from the next town had given me a lift along the post road as far as a certain short cut, which led through a pine woods and across an open pasture where once there had been a farmhouse and where, although the house had burned to the ground eight or ten years since, a barn still stood, which was known throughout the countryside as "Higgleby's."

The sky was overcast, but the moonlight nevertheless sifted through the thin clouds; and with a word of thanks to the lad who had brought me thus far, I vaulted the bars and struck off toward the pines.

My eyes were already accustomed to the darkness, and the relief from trying to see my way under the thickly interwoven branches of the grove made the open pasture, when I came to it, seem nearly as light as day, although, of course, to anyone coming out into it from a lighted room, it would have seemed quite otherwise. Of the old barn, which loomed up on the hill, a black, gaunt, lonesome object a mile or so away, I thought very little, as I walked along, until it seemed to me that I saw a glimmer of fire through a breach where a board had been torn off.

Now the barn was remote from the woods and from the village; but the weather had been dry, the dead grass in the old pasture was as inflammable as tinder, and what wind there was, was blowing toward the pines. Since it was plain that I ought to investigate that flash of fire, I left the path and began to climb the hill.

Stopping suddenly, I listened with all my ears. I thought I had heard voices; it behooved me to be cautious. Prudently, now, I advanced, and as silently as

possible. Now I *knew* that I heard voices. The knowledge that there were men in the old barn relieved me of any sense of duty in the matter of a possible fire, but at the same time it kindled my imagination. Who were they, and why had they come, and what were they doing? Instead of walking boldly up to the barn door, I began to climb the wall that served as the foundation.

The wall was six or eight feet high, but built of large stones, which afforded me easy hold for foot and hand, and from the top I was confident that I could peek in at a window just above. Very cautiously I climbed from rock to rock, until I was on my knees on the topmost tier. Now, twisting about and keeping flat to the barn with both arms extended so as not to overbalance and fall, I raised myself little by little, only to find, to my keen disappointment, that the window was still ten inches above my eyes.

That I should give up then, never occurred to me. I placed both hands on the sill and silently lifted myself until my chin was well above it.

In the middle of the old barn, by the light of four candles, a number of men were playing cards. I could hear much of what they said, but it concerned only the fortunes of the game, and as they spoke in undertones I could not recognize their voices.

For all that I got from their conversation they might as well have said naught, except that the sound of their talking and the clink of money as it changed hands served to cover whatever small noises I may have made, and thus enabled me to look in upon them undiscovered. Nor could I see who they were, for the candle light was dim and flickered, and those who were back to me, as they pressed forward in their eagerness to follow the play, concealed the faces of those opposite them. Moreover,

my position was extremely uncomfortable, perhaps even dangerous. So I lowered myself until my toes rested on the wall of rock, and kneeling very cautiously, began to descend.

Exploring with my foot until I found a likely stone, I put my weight on it, and felt it turn. Failing to clutch the top of the wall, I went down with a heavy thud.

For a moment I lay on the ground with my wind knocked out of me, completely helpless. Then sharp voices broke the silence, and the sound of someone opening the barn door instilled enough wholesome fear into me to enable me to get up on all fours after a fashion, and creep cautiously away.

From the darkness outside, my eyes being already accustomed to the absence of light, I could see a number of men standing together in front of the barn door. They must have blown out the candles, for the door and the windows and the chinks between the boards were dark. Cursing myself for a silly fool, I made off as silently as possible.

I had not recognized one of the players, I had got a bad tumble and sore joints for my trouble, and my pride was hurt. In short, I felt that I had fallen out of the small end of the horn, and I was in no cheerful mood as I limped along. But by the time I came into the village half an hour later, I had recovered my temper and my wind; and so, although I earnestly desired to go home and to bed, to rest my lame bones, I decided to go first to the store and report to Uncle Seth the results of my mission.

Through the lighted windows of the store, as I approached, I could see Arnold Lamont and Sim Muzzy playing chess in the back room. They were a strange pair, and as ill matched as any two you ever saw. Lamont

was a Frenchman, who had appeared, seemingly from nowhere, ten or a dozen years before, and in quaintly precise English had asked for work — only because it was so exceedingly precise, would you have suspected that it was a foreigner's English. He carried himself with a strange dignity, and his manner, which seemed to confer a favor rather than to seek one, had impressed Uncle Seth almost against his will.

"Why, yes," he had said sharply, "there's work enough to keep another man. But what, pray, has brought you here?"

"It is the fortune of war," Lamont had replied. And that was all that my uncle ever got out of him.

Without more ado he had joined Sim Muzzy, a well-meaning, simple fellow who had already worked for Uncle Seth for some eight years, and there he had stayed ever since.

Arnold and Sim shared the room above the store and served both as watchmen and as clerks; but it was Sim who cooked their meals, who made their beds, who swept and dusted and polished. Although the two worked for equally small pay and, all in all, were as satisfactory men as any storekeeper could hope to have, Arnold had carried even into the work of the store that same odd, foreign dignity; and it apparently never occurred, even to petulant, talkative Sim, that Arnold, so reserved, so quietly assured, should have lent his hand to mere domestic duties.

Learning early in their acquaintance, each that the other played chess, they had got a board and a set of men, and, in spite of a disparity in skill that for some people must have made it very irksome, had kept the game up ever since. Arnold Lamont played chess with the same precision with which he spoke English; and if Sim Muzzy

managed to catch him napping, and so to win one game in twenty, it was a feat to be talked about for a month to come.

Through the windows, as I said, I saw them playing chess in the back shop; then, coming round the corner of the store, I saw someone just entering. It was no other than Cornelius Gleazen, in beaver, stock, coat, and diamonds, with the perpetual cigar bit tight between his teeth.

A little to my surprise, I noticed that there were beads of perspiration on his forehead. I had been walking fast myself, and yet I had not thought of it as a warm evening: the overcast sky and the wind from the sea, with their promise of rain to break the drouth, combined to make the night the coolest we had had for some weeks. It surprised me also to see that Gleazen was breathing hard — but was he? I could not be sure.

Then, through the open door, I again saw Arnold Lamont in the back room. In his hand he was holding a knight just over the square on which it was to rest; but with his eyes he was following Cornelius Gleazen across the store and round behind my uncle's desk, where now there was a second chair in place of the cracker-box.

When Gleazen had sat down beside my uncle, he tapping the desk with a long pencil, which he had drawn from his pocket, Uncle Seth bustling about among his papers, with quick useless sallies here and there, and into the pigeonholes, as if he were confused by the mass of business that confronted him, — it was a manner he sometimes affected when visitors were present, — Arnold Lamont put down the knight and absently, as if his mind were far away, said in his calm, precise voice, "Check!"

"No, no! You must n't do that! You can't do that! That's wrong! See! You were on that square there —

see? — and you moved so! You can't put your knight there," Sim Muzzy cried.

That Lamont had transgressed by mistake the rules of the game hit Sim like a thunderclap and even further befuddled his poor wits.

"Ah," said Lamont, "I see. I beg you, pardon my error. So! Check."

He again moved the knight, apparently without thought; and Sim Muzzy fell to biting his lip and puzzling this way and that and working his fingers, which he always did when he was getting the worst of the game.

Arnold Lamont seemed not to care a straw about the game. Through the door he was watching Cornelius Gleazen. And Cornelius Gleazen was wiping his forehead with his handkerchief.

I wondered if it was my lively imagination that made me think that he was breathing quickly. How long would it have taken him, I wondered, to cut across the pasture from Higgleby's barn to the north road? Coming thus by the Four Corners, could he have reached the store ahead of me? Or could he, by way of the shunpike, have passed me on the road?

CHAPTER IV

SWORDS AND SHIPS

Having succeeded in establishing himself in the society and confidence of the more substantial men of the village, and having discomfited completely those few — among whom remained the blacksmith — who had treated him shabbily in the first weeks of his return and had continued ever since to regard him with suspicion, Cornelius Gleazen began now to extend his campaign to other quarters, and to curry favor among those whose good-will, so far as I could see, was really of little weight one way or another. He now cast off something of his arrogant, disdainful air, and won the hearts of the children by strange knickknacks and scrimshaws, which he would produce, sometimes from his pockets, and sometimes, by delectable sleight of hand, from the very air itself. Before long half the homes in the village boasted whale's teeth on which were wrought pictures of whales and ships and savages, or chips of ivory carved into odd little idols, and every one of them, you would find, if you took the trouble to ask, came from the old chests that Neil Gleazen kept under the bed in his room at the tavern, where now he was regarded as the prince of guests.

To those who were a little older he gave more elaborate trinkets of ivory and of dark, strange woods; and the report grew, and found ready belief, that he had prospered greatly in trade before he decided to retire, and that he had brought home a fortune with which to settle down in the old town; for the toys that he gave away so freely were worth, we judged, no inconsiderable sum. But to

the lads in their early twenties, of whom I was one, he endeared himself perhaps most of all when, one fine afternoon, smoking one of his long cigars and wearing his beaver tilted forward at just such an angle, he came down the road with a great awkward bundle under his arm, and disclosed on the porch of my uncle's store half a dozen foils and a pair of masks.

He smiled when all the young fellows in sight and hearing gathered round him eagerly, and called one another to come and see, and picked up the foils and passed at one another awkwardly. There was an odd satisfaction in his smile, as if he had gained something worth the having. What a man of his apparent means could care for our good-will, I could not have said if anyone had asked me, and at the time I did not think to wonder about it. But his air of triumph, when I later had occasion to recall it to mind, convinced me that for our good-will he did care, and that he was manœuvring to win and hold it.

It was interesting to mark how the different ones took his playthings. Sim Muzzy cried out in wonder and earnestly asked, "Are those what men kill themselves with in duels? Pray how do they stick 'em in when the points are blunted?" Arnold Lamont, without a word or a change of expression, picked up a foil at random and tested the blade by bending it against the wall. Uncle Seth, having satisfied his curiosity by a glance, cried sharply, "That's all very interesting, but there's work to be done. Come, come, I pay no one for gawking out the door."

The lively hum of voices continued, and a number of town boys remained to examine the weapons; but Arnold, Sim, and I obediently turned back into the store.

"That's all right, lads," Cornelius Gleazen cried. "Come evening, I'll show you a few points on using these

toys. I'll make a fencing-master and a good one, I'll have you know, and there are some among you that have the making of swordsmen. You're one, Joe Woods, you're one."

I was pleased to be singled out, and went to my work with a will, thinking meanwhile of the promised lessons. It never occurred to me that Cornelius Gleazen could have had a motive that did not appear on the surface for so choosing my name from all the rest.

That evening, true to his promise, he took us in hand on the village green, with four fifths of the village standing by to watch, and gave us lessons in thrusting and parrying and stepping swiftly forward and backward. We were an awkward company of recruits, and for our pains we got only hearty laughter from the onlookers; but the new sport captured our imagination, and realizing that, once upon a time, even Cornelius Gleazen himself had been a tyro, we zealously worked to learn what we could, and in our idle moments we watched with frank admiration the grand flourishes and great leaps and stamps of which Gleazen was master.

The diamond on the finger of his gracefully curved left hand flashed as he sprang about, and his ruffled shirt, damped by his unwonted exercise, clung close to his big shoulders and well-formed back. Surely, we thought, few could equal his surprising agility; the great voice in which he roared his suggestions and commands increased our confidence in his knowledge of swordsmanship.

When, after my second turn at his instruction, I came away with my arms aching from the unaccustomed exertion and saw that Arnold Lamont was watching us and covertly smiling, I flamed red and all but lost my temper. Why should he laugh at *me*, I thought. Surely I was no clumsier than the others. Indeed, he who thought him-

self so smart probably could not do half so well. Had not Mr. Gleazen praised me most of all? In my anger at Arnold's secret amusement, I avoided him that evening and for several days to come.

It was on Saturday night, when we were closing the store for the week, that quite another subject led me back to my resentment in such a way that we had the matter out between us; and as all that we had to say is more or less intimately connected with my story I will set it down word for word.

A young woman in a great quilted bonnet of the kind that we used to call calash, and a dress that she no doubt thought very fetching, came mincing into the store and ordered this thing and that in a way that kept me attending closely to her desires. When she had gone mincing out again, I turned so impatiently to put the counter to rights, that Arnold softly chuckled.

"Apparently," said he, with a quiet smile, "the lady did not impress you quite as she desired, Joe."

"Impress me!" I snorted, ungallantly imitating her mincing manner. "She impressed me as much as any of them."

"You must have patience, Joe. Some day there will come a lady — "

"No, no!" I cried, with the cocksure assertiveness of my years.

"But yes!"

"Not I! No, no, Arnold —, 'needles and pins, needles and pins' — "

" 'When a man marries his trouble begins'? " Sadness now shadowed Arnold's expressive face. "No! Proverbs sometimes are pernicious."

"You are laughing at me!"

I had detected, through the veil of melancholy that

seemed to have fallen over him, a faint ray of something akin to humor.

"I am not laughing at you, Joe." His voice was sad. "You will marry some day — marry and settle down. It is good to do so. I — "

There was something in his stopping that made me look at him in wonder. Immediately he was himself again, calm, wise, taciturn; but in spite of my youth I instinctively felt that only by suffering could a man win his way to such kindly, quiet dignity.

I had said that I would not marry: no wonder, I have since thought, that Arnold looked at me with that gentle humor. Never dreaming that in only a few short months a new name and a new face were to fill my mind and my heart with a world of new anxieties and sorrows and joys, never dreaming of the strange and distant adventures through which Arnold and I were to pass,— if a fortune-teller had foretold the story, I should have laughed it to scorn,— I was only angry at his amused smile. Perhaps I had expected him to argue with me, to try to correct my notions. In any case, when he so kindly and yet keenly appraised at its true worth my boyish pose, I was sobered for a moment by the sadness that he himself had revealed; then I all but flew into a temper.

"Oh, very well! Go on and laugh at me. You were laughing at me the other night when I was fencing, too. I saw you. I'd like to see you do better yourself. Go on and laugh, you who are so wise."

Arnold's smile vanished. "I am not laughing at you, Joe. Nor was I laughing at you then."

"You were not laughing at me?"

"No."

"At whom, then, were you laughing?"

To this Arnold did not reply.

The fencing lessons, begun so auspiciously that first evening, became a regular event. Every night we gathered on the green and fenced together until twilight had all but settled into dark. Little by little we learned such tricks of attack and defense as our master could teach us, until we, too, could stamp and leap, and parry with whistling circles of the blade. And as we did so, we young fellows of the village came more and more to look upon Cornelius Gleazen almost as one of us.

Though his coming had aroused suspicion, though for many weeks there were few who would say a good word for him, as the summer wore away, he established himself so firmly in the life of his native town that people began to forget, as far as anyone could see, that he had ever had occasion to leave it in great haste.

If he praised my fencing and gave me more time than the others, I thought it no more than my due — was I not a young man of great prospects? If Uncle Seth had at first regarded him with suspicion, Uncle Seth, too, had quite returned now to his old abrupt, masterful way and was again as sharp and quick of tongue as ever, even when Neil Gleazen was sitting in Uncle Seth's own chair and at his own desk. Perhaps, had we been keener, we should have suspected that something was wrong, simply because *no one* — expect a few stupid persons like the blacksmith — had a word to say against Neil Gleazen. You would at least have expected his old cronies to resent his leaving them for more respectable company. But not even from them did there come a whisper of suspicion or complaint.

Why should not a man come home to his native place to enjoy the prosperity of his later years? we argued. It was the most natural thing in the world; and when Cornelius Gleazen talked of foreign wars and the state of the country and the deaths of Mr. Adams and Mr. Jefferson,

and of the duel between Mr. Clay and Mr. Randolph, the most intelligent of us listened with respect, and found occasion in his shrewd observations and trenchant comment to rejoice that Topham had so able a son to return to her in the full power of his maturity.

There was even talk of sending him to Congress, and that it was not idle gossip I know because three politicians from Boston came to town and conferred with our selectmen and Judge Bordman over their wine at the inn for a long evening; and Peter Nuttles, whose sister waited on them, spread the story to the ends of the county.

Late one night, when Uncle Seth and I were about to set out for home, leaving Arnold and Sim to lock up the store, we parted with Gleazen on the porch, he stalking off to the right in the moonlight and swinging his cane as he went, we turning our backs on the village and the bright windows of the tavern, and stepping smartly toward our own dark house, in which the one lighted lamp shone from the window of the room that Mrs. Jameson, our housekeeper, occupied.

"He's a man of judgment," Uncle Seth said, as if meditating aloud, "rare judgment and a wonderful knowledge of the world."

He seemed to expect no reply, and I made none.

"He was venturesome to rashness as a boy," Uncle Seth presently continued. "All that seems to have changed now."

We walked along through the dust. The weeds beside the road and the branches of the trees and shrubs were damp with dew.

"As a boy," Uncle Seth said at last, "I should never have thought of going to Neil Gleazen for judgment — aye, or for knowledge." And when we stood on the porch in the moonlight and looked back at the village, where all

the houses were dark now except for a lamp here and there that continued to burn far into the night, he added, "How would you like to leave all this, Joe, and wrestle a fall with fortune for big stakes — aye, for rich stakes, with everything in our favor to win?"

At something in his voice I turned on my heel, my heart leaping, and stared hard at him.

As if he suddenly realized that he had been saying things he ought not to say, he gave himself a quick shake, and woke from his meditations with a start. "We must away to bed," he cried sharply. "It's close on midnight."

Here was a matter for speculation. For an hour that afternoon and for another hour that evening Uncle Seth and Neil Gleazen had sat behind my uncle's desk, with their chairs drawn close together and the beaver laid on the cracker-box, and had scribbled endless columns of figures and mysterious notes on sheet after sheet of foolscap. What, I wondered, did it mean?

At noon next day, as I was waiting on customers in the front of the store, I saw a rider with full saddlebags pass, on a great black horse, and shortly afterwards I heard one of the customers remark that the horse was standing at the inn. Glancing out of the window, I saw that the rider had dismounted and was talking with Cornelius Gleazen; though the distance was considerable, Gleazen's bearing and the forward tilt of his beaver were unmistakable. When next I passed the window, I saw that Gleazen was posting down the road toward the store, with his beaver tipped even farther over his right eye, his cane swinging, and a bundle under his arm.

As I bowed the customers out, Gleazen entered the store, brushing past me with a nod, and loudly called, "Seth Upham! Seth Upham! Where are you?"

"Here I am. What's wanted?" my uncle testily re-

torted, as he emerged from a bin into which he had thrust his head and shoulders in his efforts to fill a peck measure.

"Come, come," cried Gleazen in his great, gruff voice. "Here's news!"

"News," returned my uncle, sharply; "news is no reason to scare a man out of a year's growth."

Neil Gleazen laughed loudly and gave my uncle a resounding slap on the back that made him writhe. "News, Seth, news is the key to fortune. Come, man, come, lay by your pettifogging. Here's papers just in by the post. You ain't going to let 'em lie no more than I am."

To my amazement,— I could never get used to it,— my uncle's resentment seemed to go like mist before the sun, and he said not a word against the boisterous roughness of the friend of his youth, although I almost believe that, if anyone else had dared to treat him so, he would have grained the man with a hayfork. Instead, he wiped his hands on his coarse apron and followed Gleazen to the desk, where they sat down in the two chairs that now were always behind it.

For a time they talked in voices so low that I heard nothing of their conversation; but after a while, as they became more and more absorbed in their business, their voices rose, and I perceived that Gleazen was reading aloud from the papers some advertisements in which he seemed especially interested.

"Here's this," he would cry. "Listen to this. If this ain't a good one, I'll miss my guess. 'Executor's sale, Ship Congress: on Saturday the 15th, at twelve o'clock, at the wharf of the late William Gray, Lynn Street, will be sold at public auction the ship Congress, built at Mattapoisett near New Bedford in the year 1823 and designed for the whale fishery. Measures 349 tons, is copper fastened and was copper sheathed over felt in London

on the first voyage, and is in every respect a first-rate vessel. She has two suits of sails, chain and hemp cables, and is well found in the usual appurtenances. By order of the executors of the late William Gray, Whitewell, Bond and Company, Auctioneers.' There, Seth, there's a vessel for you, I'll warrant you."

My uncle murmured something that I could not hear; then Gleazen tipped his beaver back on his head — for once he had neglected to set it on the cracker-box — and hoarsely laughed. "Well, I'll be shot!" he roared. "How's a man to better himself, if he's so confounded cautious? Well, then, how's this: 'Marshal's Sale. United States of America, District of Massachusetts, Boston, August 31, 1826. Pursuant to a warrant from the Honorable John Davis, Judge of the District Court for the District aforesaid, I hereby give public notice that I shall sell at public auction on Wednesday the 8th day of September, at 12 o'clock noon, at Long Wharf, the schooner Caroline and Clara, libelled for wages by William Shipley, and the money arising from the sale to be paid into court. Samuel D. Hains, Marshal.' That'll come cheap, if cheap you'll have. But mark what I tell you, Seth, that what comes cheap, goes cheap. There's no good in it. It ain't as if you had n't the money. The plan's mine, and I tell you, it's a good one, with three merry men waiting for us over yonder. Half 's for you, a whole half, mind you; and half 's to be divided amongst the rest of us. It don't pay to try to do things cheap. What with gear carried away and goods damaged, it don't pay."

Uncle Seth was marking lines on the margin of the newspaper before them.

"I wonder," he began, "how much — "

Then they talked in undertones, and I heard nothing more.

CHAPTER V

A MYSTERIOUS PROJECT

For three days I watched with growing amazement the strange behavior of my uncle. Now he would sit hunched up over his desk and search through a great pile of documents from the safe; now he would toss the papers into his strong box, lock it, and return it to its place in the vault, and pace the floor in a revery so deep that you could speak in his very ear without getting a reply. At one minute he would be as cross as a devil's imp, and turn on you in fury if you wished to do him a favor; at the next he would fairly laugh aloud with good humor.

The only man at whom he never flew out in a rage was Cornelius Gleazen, and why this should be so, I could only guess. You may be sure that I, and others, tried hard to fathom the secret, when the two of them were sitting at my uncle's desk over a huge mass of papers, as they were for hours at a time.

On the noon of the third day they settled themselves together at the desk and talked interminably in undertones. Now Uncle Seth would bend over his papers; now he would look off across the road and the meadows to the woods beyond. Now he would put questions; now he would sit silent. An hour passed, and another, and another. At four o'clock they were still there, still talking in undertones. At five o'clock their heads were closer together than ever. Now Neil Gleazen was tapping on the top of his beaver. He had a strange look, which I did not understand, and between his eyes and the flashing of his diamond as his finger tapped the hat, he charmed me as if he were a

snake. Even Sim Muzzy was watching them curiously, and on Arnold Lamont's fine, sober face there was an expression of mingled wonder and distrust.

Customers came, and we waited on them; and when they had gone, the two were still there. The clocks were striking six when I faced about, hearing their chairs move, and saw them shaking hands and smiling. Then Cornelius Gleazen went away, and my uncle, carefully locking up his papers, went out, too.

Supper was late that night, for I waited until Uncle Seth came in; but he made no excuse for his long absence and late return. He ate rapidly and in silence, as if he were not thinking of his food, and he took no wine until he had pushed his plate away. Then he poured himself a glass from the decanter, tasted it, and said, "I am to be away to-morrow, Joe."

"Yes, sir," said I.

"I may be back to-morrow night and I may not. As to that, I can't say. But I wish, come afternoon, you'd go to Abe Guptil's for me. I've an errand there I want you to do."

I waited in silence.

"I hold a mortgage of two thousand dollars on his place," he presently went on. "I've let it run, out of good-nature. Good-nature don't pay. Well, I'm going to need the money. Give him a month to pay up. If he can't, tell him I'll sell him out."

"You'll what?" I cried, not believing that I heard him aright.

"I'll sell him out. Pringle has been wanting the place and he'll give at least two thousand."

"Now, Uncle Seth, Abraham Guptil's been a long time sick. His best horse broke a leg a while back and he had to shoot it, and while he was sick his crops failed. He can't

pay you now. Give him another year. He's good for the money and he pays his interest on the day it's due."

Uncle Seth frowned. "I've been too good-natured," he said sharply. "I need the money myself. I shall sell him out."

"But —"

"Well?"

I stopped short. After all, I could not save Abe Guptil — I knew Uncle Seth too well for that. And it might be easier for Abe if I broke the news than if, say, Uncle Seth did.

"Very well," I replied after a moment's thought. "I will go."

Uncle Seth, appeased by my compliance, gave a short grunt, curtly bade me good-night and stumped off to bed. But I, wondering what was afoot, sat a long time at table while the candles burned lower and lower.

Next morning, clad in his Sunday best, Uncle Seth waited in front of the store, with his horses harnessed and ready, until the tall familiar figure, with cane, cigar, and beaver hat, came marching grandly down from the inn. Then the two got into the carriage and drove away.

Some hours later, leaving Arnold Lamont in charge of the store, I set off in turn, but humbly and on foot, toward the white house by the distant sea where poor Abraham Guptil lived; and you can be sure that it made me sick at heart to think of my errand.

From the pine land and meadows of Topham, the road emerged on the border of a salt marsh, along which I tramped for an hour or two; then, passing now through scrubby timber, now between barren farms, it led up on higher ground, which a few miles farther on fell away to tawny rocks and yellow sand and the sea, which came rolling in on the beach in long, white hissing waves. Islands

in the offing seemed to give promise of other, far-distant lands; and the sun was so bright and the water so blue that I thought to myself how much I would give to go a-sailing with Uncle Seth in search of adventure.

Late in the afternoon I saw ahead of me, beside the road, the small white house, miles away from any other, where Abraham Guptil lived. A dog came barking out at me, and a little boy came to call back the dog; then a woman appeared in the door and told me I was welcome. Abe, it seemed, was away working for a neighbor, but he would be back soon, for supper-time was near. If I would stay with them for the meal, she said, they should be glad and honored.

So I sat down on the doorstone and made friends with the boy and the dog, and talked away about little things that interested the boy, until we saw Abraham Guptil coming home across the fields with the sun at his back.

He shook hands warmly, but his face was anxious, and when after supper we went out doors and I told him as kindly as I could the errand on which my uncle had sent me, he shook his head.

"I feared it," said he. "It's rumored round the country that Seth Upham's collecting money wherever he can. Without this, I've been in desperate straits, and now — "

He spread his hands hopelessly and leaned against the fence. His eyes wandered over the acres on which he was raising crops by sheer strength and determination. It was a poor, stony farm, yet the man had claimed it from the wilderness and, what with fishing and odd jobs, had been making a success of life until one misfortune after another had fairly overwhelmed him.

"It must go," he said at last.

As best I could, I was taking leave of him for the long

tramp home, when he suddenly roused himself and cried, "But stay! See! The storm is hard upon us. You must not go back until to-morrow."

Heavy clouds were banking in the west, and already we could hear the rumble of thunder.

It troubled me to accept the hospitality of the Guptils when I had come on such an errand; but the kindly souls would hear of no denial, so I joined Abe in the chores with such good-will, that we had milked, and fed the stock, and closed the barns for the night before the first drops fell.

Meanwhile much had gone forward indoors, and when we returned to the house I was shown to a great bed made up with clean linen fragrant of lavender. Darkness had scarcely fallen, but I was so weary that I undressed and threw myself on the bed and went quietly to sleep while the storm came raging down the coast.

As one so often does in a strange place, I woke uncommonly early. Dawn had no more than touched the eastern horizon, but I got out of bed and, hearing someone stirring, went to the window. A door closed very gently, then a man came round the corner of the house and struck off across the fields. It was Abraham Guptil. What could he be doing abroad at that hour? Going to the door of my room, which led into the kitchen, I softly opened it, then stopped in amazement. Someone was asleep on the kitchen floor. I looked closer and saw that it was a woman with a child; then I turned back and closed the door again.

Rather than send me away, even though I brought a message that meant the loss of their home, those good people had given me the one bed in the house, and themselves, man, woman, and child, had slept on hard boards, with only a blanket under them.

Since I could not leave my room without their knowing that I had discovered their secret, I sat down by the win-

dow and watched the dawn come across the sea upon a world that was clean and cool after the shower of the night. For an hour, as the light grew stronger, I watched the slow waves that came rolling in and poured upon the long rocks in cascades of silver; and still the time wore on, and still Abe remained away. Another hour had nearly gone when I saw him coming in the distance along the shore, and heard his wife stirring outside.

Now someone knocked at my door.

I replied with a prompt "Good-morning," and presently went into the kitchen, where the three greeted me warmly. All signs of their sleeping on the kitchen floor had vanished.

"I don't know what I shall do, Joe," said Abraham Guptil when I was taking leave of him an hour later. "This place is all I have."

I made up my mind there and then that neither Abraham Guptil nor his wife and child should suffer want.

"I'll see to that," I replied. "There'll be something for you to do and some place for you to go."

Then, with no idea how I should fulfil my promise, I shook his hand and left him.

When at last I got back to the store, Arnold Lamont was there alone. My uncle had not returned, and Sim Muzzy had gone fishing. It was an uncommonly hot day, and since there were few customers, we sat and talked of one thing and another.

When I saw that Arnold was looking closely at the foils, which stood in a corner, an idea came to me. Cornelius Gleazen had praised my swordsmanship to the skies, and, indeed, I was truly becoming a match for him. Twice I had actually taken a bout from him, with a great swishing and clattering of blades and stamping of feet, and now, although he continued to give me lessons, he no longer

would meet me in an assault. As for the other young fellows, I had far and away outstripped them.

"Would you like to try the foils once, Arnold?" I asked. "I'll give you a lesson if you say so."

For a moment I thought there was a twinkle in the depths of his eyes; but when I looked again they were sober and innocent.

"Why, yes," he said.

Something in the way he tested the foils made me a bit uneasy, in spite of my confidence, but I shrugged it off.

"You have learned well by watching," I said, as we came on guard.

"I have tried it before," said he.

"Then," said I, "I will lunge and you shall see if you can parry me."

"Very well."

After a few perfunctory passes, during which I advanced and retreated in a way that I flattered myself was exceptionally clever, and after a quick feint in low line, I disengaged, deceived a counter-parry by doubling, and confidently lunged. To my amazement my foil rested against his blade hardly out of line with his body — so slightly out of line that I honestly believed the attack had miscarried by my own clumsiness. Certainly I never had seen so nice a parry. That I escaped a riposte, I attributed to my deft recovery and the constant pressure of my blade on his; but even then I had an uncomfortable suspicion that behind the veil of his black mask Arnold was smiling, and I was really dazed by the failure of an attack that seemed to me so well planned and executed.

Then, suddenly, easily, lightly, Arnold Lamont's blade wove its way through my guard. His arms, his legs, his body moved with a lithe precision such as I had never dreamed of; my own foil, circling desperately, failed to

find his, and his button rested for a moment against my right breast so surely and so competently that, in the face of his skill, I simply dropped my guard and stood in frank wonder and admiration.

Even then I was vaguely aware that I could not fully appreciate it. Though I had thought myself an accomplished swordsman, the man's dexterity, which had revealed me as a clumsy blunderer, was so amazingly superior to anything I had ever seen, that I simply could not realize to the full how remarkable it was.

I whipped off my mask and cried, "You,— you *are* a fencer."

He smiled. "Are you surprised? A man does not tell all he knows."

As I looked him in the face, I wondered at him. Uncle Seth had come to rely upon him implicitly for far more than you can get from any ordinary clerk. Yet we really knew nothing at all about him. "A man does not tell all he knows"— He had held his tongue without a slip for all those years.

I saw him now in a new light. His face was keen, but more than keen. There was real wisdom in it. The quiet, confident dignity with which he always bore himself seemed suddenly to assume a new, deeper, more mysterious significance. Whatever the man might be, it was certain that he was no mere shopkeeper's clerk.

That afternoon Uncle Seth and Gleazen, the one strangely elated, the other more pompous and grand than ever, returned in the carriage. Of their errand, for the time being they said nothing.

Uncle Seth merely asked about Abe Guptil's note; and, when I answered him, impatiently grunted.

Poor Abe, I thought, and wondered what had come over my uncle.

In the evening, as we were finishing supper, Uncle Seth leaned back with a broad smile. "Joe, my lad," he said, "our fortunes are making. Great days are ahead. I can buy and sell the town of Topham now, but before we are through, Joe, I — or you with the money I shall leave you — can buy and sell the city of Boston — aye, or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. There are great days ahead, Joe."

"But what," I asked, with fear at my heart, "but what is this great venture?"

Uncle Seth looked at me with a smile that expressed whatever power of affection was left in his hard old shell of a heart,— a meagre affection, yet, as far as it went, all centred upon me,— and revealed a great conceit of his own wisdom.

"Joe," he said, leaning forward on his elbows till his face, on which the light threw every testy wrinkle into sharp relief, was midway between the two candles at the end of the table, "Joe, I've bought a ship and we're all going to Africa."

For a moment his voice expressed confidence; for a moment his affection for me triumphed over his native sharpness.

"You're all I've got, Joey," he cried, "You're all that's left to the old man, and I'm going to do well by you. Whatever I have is yours, Joey; it's all coming to you, every cent and every dollar. Here,— you must be wanting a bit of money to spend,— here!" He thrust his hand into his pocket and flung half a dozen gold pieces down on the dark, well-oiled mahogany where they rang and rolled and shone dully in the candle-light. "I swear, Joey, I think a lot of you."

I suppose that not five people in all Topham had ever seen Uncle Seth in such a mood. I am sure that, if they

had, the town could never have thought of him as only a cold, exacting man. But now a fear apparently overwhelmed him lest by so speaking out through his reticence he had committed some unforgivable offense — lest he had told too much. He seemed suddenly to snap back into his hard, cynical shell. "But of that, no more," he said sharply. "Not a word 's to be said, you understand. Not a word — to *any one*."

When I went back to the store that evening, I sat on the porch in the darkness and thought of Uncle Seth as I had seen him across the table, his face thrust forward between the candles, his elbows planted on the white linen, with the dim, restful walls of the room behind him, with the faces of my father and my mother looking down upon us from the gilt frames on the wall. I knew him too well to ask questions, even though, as I sat on the store porch, he was sitting just behind me inside the open window.

What, I wondered, almost in despair, could we, of all people, do with a ship and a voyage to Africa? Had I not seen Cornelius Gleazen play upon my uncle's fear and vanity and credulity? I had no doubt whatever that the same Neil Gleazen, who had been run out of town thirty years before, was at the bottom of whatever mad voyage my uncle was going to send his ship upon.

Then I thought of good old Abraham Guptil, so soon to be turned out of house and home, and of Arnold Lamont, who saw and knew and understood so much, yet said so little. And again I thought of Cornelius Gleazen; and when I was thinking of him, a strange thing came to pass.

Down in the village a dog barked fiercely, then another nearer the store, then another; then I saw coming up the road a figure that I could not mistake. The man with that tall hat, that flowing coat, that nonchalant air, which even

the faint light of the stars revealed, could be no other than Cornelius Gleazen himself.

In the store behind me I heard the low drone of conversation from the men gathered round the stove, the click of a chessman set firmly on the board, the voice of Arnold Lamont — so clear, so precise, and yet so definitely and indescribably foreign — saying, "Check!" Through the small panes of glass I saw my uncle frowning over his ledgers. Now he noted some figure on the foolscap at his right, now he appeared to count on his fingers.

I turned again to watch Cornelius Gleazen. Of course he could not know that anyone was sitting on the porch in the darkness. When he passed the store, he looked over at it with a turn of his head and a twist of his shoulders. His gesture gave me an impression of scorn and triumph so strong that I hardly restrained myself from retorting loudly and angrily. Then I bit my lip and watched him go by and disappear.

"Who," I wondered, "who and *what* really is Cornelius Gleazen?"

II

HANDS ACROSS THE SEA

CHAPTER VI

GOOD-BYE TO OLD HAUNTS AND FACES

That some extraordinary thing was afoot next day, every soul who worked in our store, or who entered it on business, vaguely felt. To me, who had gained a hint of what was going forward, — baffling and tantalizing, yet a hint for all that, — and to Arnold Lamont, who, I was convinced as I saw him watch my uncle's nervous movements, although he had no such plain hint to go upon, had by his keen, silent observation unearthed even more than I, the sense of an impending great event was far from vague. I felt as sure as of my own name that before nightfall something would happen to uproot me from my native town, whose white houses and green trees and hedges, kindly people and familiar associations, lovely scenes and quiet, homely life I so deeply loved.

The strange light in Cornelius Gleazen's eyes, as he watched us hard at work taking an inventory of stock, confirmed me in the presentiment. My uncle's harassed, nervous manner as he drove us on with our various duties, Sim Muzzy's garrulous bewilderment, and Arnold Lamont's keen, silent appraisal, added each its little to the sum of my convictions.

The warmer the day grew, the harder we worked. Uncle Seth flew about like a madman, picking us up on this thing and that, and urging one to greater haste, another to greater care. Throwing off his coat, he pitched in with his own hands, and performed such prodigies of labor that it seemed as if our force were doubled by the addition of himself alone. And all the time Neil Gleazen sat and smiled and tapped his beaver.

He was so cool, so impudent about it, that I longed to turn on him and vent my spleen; but to Uncle Seth it apparently seemed entirely suitable that Gleazen should idle while others worked.

Of the true meaning of all this haste and turmoil I had no further inkling until in the early afternoon Gleazen called loudly,—

"He's here, prompt to the minute."

Then Uncle Seth drew a long breath, mopped the sweat from his face and cried,—

"I'm ready for him, thank heaven! The boys can be finishing up what little's left."

I looked, and saw a gentleman, just alighted from his chaise, tying a handsome black horse to the hitching-post before the door.

Turning his back upon us all, Uncle Seth rushed to the door, his hands extended, and cried, "Welcome, sir! Since cock-crow this morning we have been hard at work upon the inventory, and it's this minute done — at least, all but adding a few columns. Sim, another chair by my desk. Quick! Mr. Gleazen, I wish to present you to Mr. Brown. Come in, sir, come in."

The three shook hands, and all sat down together and talked for some time; then, at the stranger's remark,— "Now for figures. There's nothing like figures to tell a story, Mr. Upham. Eh, Mr. Gleazen? We can run over those columns you spoke of, here and now," — they bestirred themselves.

"You're right, sir," Uncle Seth cried: and then he sharply called, "Arnold, bring me those lists you've just finished. That's right; is that all? Well, then you take the other boys and return those boxes in the back room to their shelves. That'll occupy you all of an hour."

No longer able to pick up an occasional sentence of their

talk, we glumly retired out of earshot and were more than ever irritated when Gleazen, his cigar between his teeth, stamped up to the door between the front room and the back and firmly closed it.

"Why should they wish so much to be alone?" Arnold asked.

I ventured no reply; but Sim Muzzy, as if personally affronted, burst hotly forth: —

"You'd think Seth Upham would know enough to ask the advice of a man who's been working for him ever since Neil Gleazen ran away from home, now would n't you? Here I've toiled day in and out and done good work for him and learned the business, for all the many times he's said he never saw a thicker head, until there ain't a better hand at candling eggs, not this side of Boston, than I be. And does he ask my advice when he's got something up his sleeve? No, he don't! And yet I'll leave it to Arnold, here, if my nose ain't keener to scent sour milk than any nose in Topham — yes, sir."

The idea of Sim Muzzy's advice on any matter of greater importance than the condition of an egg or the sweetness of milk, in determining which, to do him justice, he was entirely competent, struck me as so funny that I almost sniggered. Nor could I have restrained myself, even so, when I perceived Arnold looking at me solemnly and as if reproachfully, had not Uncle Seth just then opened the door and called, "Sim, there's a lady here wants some calico and spices. Come and wait on her."

When, fifteen minutes later, Sim returned, closing the door smartly behind him, Arnold asked with a droll quirk, which I alone perceived, "Well, my friend, what did you gather during your stay in yonder?"

"Gather? Gather?" Sim spluttered. "I gathered nothing. There was talk of dollars and cents and pounds and

pence, and stocks and oils, and ships and horses, and though I listened till my head swam, all I could make out was when Neil Gleazen told me to shut the door behind my back. If they was to ask my advice, I'd tell 'em to talk sense, that's what I'd do."

"Ah, Sim," said Arnold, "if only they were to ask thy advice, what advice thee would give them !"

"Now you're talking like a Quaker," Sim replied hotly. "Why do Quakers talk that way, I'd like to know. Thee-ing and thou-ing till it is enough to fuddle a sober man's wits. I declare they are almost as bad as people in foreign parts who, I've heard tell, have such a queer way of talking that an honest man can't at all understand what they're saying until he's got used to it."

"Such, indeed, is the way of the inconsiderate world, Sim," Arnold dryly replied.

Then the three of us put our shoulders to a hogshead, and in the mighty effort of lifting it to the bulkhead sill ceased to talk.

As we finally raised it and shoved it into the yard, Sim stepped farther out than Arnold and I, and looking toward the street, whispered, "He's going."

I sprang over beside him and saw that the visitor, having already unhitched his horse, was shaking hands with Uncle Seth. Stepping into the chaise, he then drove off.

For a space of time so long that the man must have come to the bend in the road, Uncle Seth and Cornelius Gleazen watched him as he went; then, to puzzle us still further, smiling broadly, they shook hands, and turning about, still entirely unaware that we were watching them, walked with oddly pleased expressions back into the store.

My uncle's face expressed such confidence and friendliness as even I had seldom seen on it.

"Now ain't that queer?" Sim began. "If Seth Upham was a little less set in his ways, I'd —"

With a shrug Arnold Lamont broke in upon what seemed likely to be a long harangue, and made a comment that was much more to the point. "Now," said he, "we are going to hear what has happened."

Surely enough, we thought. No sooner were we back in the store, all three of us, than the door opened and in came Uncle Seth.

"Well," said he, brusquely, and yet with a certain pleased expression still lingering about his eyes, "I expected you to have done more. Hm! Well, work hard. We must have things in order come morning."

Arnold smiled as my uncle promptly returned to the front room, but Sim and I were keenly disappointed.

"How now, you who are so clever?" Sim cried when Uncle Seth again had closed the door. "How now, Arnold? We have heard nothing."

"Why," said Arnold, imperturbably, "not exactly 'nothing.' We have learned that the man is coming back to-morrow."

"Are you crazy?" Sim responded. "Seth Upham said nothing of the kind."

Arnold only smiled again. "Wait and see," he said.

So we worked until late at night, putting all once more to rights; and in the morning, true to Arnold's prophecy, the gentleman with the big black horse, accompanied now by a friend, made a second visit in the front room of the store.

This time he talked but briefly with Uncle Seth and Neil Gleazen, who had already waited an hour for his arrival. As if eager to see our business for himself, he then walked through the store, examining every little detail of the stock and fixtures, and asked a vast number of ques-

tions, which in themselves showed that he knew what he was about and that he was determined to get at the bottom of our affairs. There was talk of barrels of Alexandria superfine flour and hogsheads of Kentucky tobacco; of teas — Hyson, young Hyson, Hyson skin, Powchong and Souchong; of oil, summer and winter; of Isles of Shoals dun fish and Holland gin and preserved ginger, and one thing and another, until, with answering the questions they asked me, I was fairly dizzy.

Having examined store and stock to his satisfaction, he then went with Uncle Seth, to my growing wonder, up to our own house; and from what Sim reported when he came back from a trip to spy upon them, they examined the house with the same care. In due course they returned to the store and sat down at the desk, and then the friend who accompanied our first visitor wrote for some time on an official-looking document; Uncle Seth and the strange gentleman signed it; Arnold Lamont, whom they summoned for the purpose, and Cornelius Gleazen witnessed it; and all four drove away together, the gentleman and his friend in their chaise and Uncle Seth and Neil Gleazen in our own.

"When Seth Upham returns," said Arnold, "we shall be told all."

And it was so.

Coming back alone in the late afternoon, Uncle Seth and Gleazen left the chaise at the door, and entering, announced that we should close the store early that day. Gleazen was radiant with good-nature, and there was the odor of liquor on his breath. Uncle Seth, on the contrary, appeared not to have tasted a drop. He was, if anything, a little sharper than ever at one moment, a little more jovial at the next, excited always, and full of some mysterious news that seemed both to delight and to frighten him.

Obediently we fastened the shutters and drew the shades and made ready for the night.

"Now, lads," said Uncle Seth, "come in by my desk and take chairs. I have news for you."

Exchanging glances, we did so. Even Sim Muzzy was silent now.

We all sat down together, Uncle Seth and Neil Gleazen at the desk, Arnold Lamont and I a little at one side, and Sim Muzzy tilting back importantly at a point from which he could watch us all.

At the time I thought what an interesting study in character the others made; but since then I have come to think that by my own attitude toward them I revealed more of the manner of youth I myself was, than by their bearing they revealed of the manner of men they were. There was Neil Gleazen, who held his cigar in his left hand and, with the finger on which his great diamond flashed, knocked each bit of ash on the floor so promptly after it formed, that the glowing coal of fire seemed to eat into the dark tobacco and leave no residue whatever. I was confident that he thought more of me both for my good fellowship and for my sound sense than he thought of any of the others present — or in town, for that matter! As for Uncle Seth, who was at once nervous and elated, I must confess, although it did not take me long to learn enough to be heartily ashamed of it, that I was just a little inclined in my own mind to patronize him; for although all my excellent prospects came entirely from his shrewd labors, I felt that he was essentially the big toad in the small puddle.

With the others, I smiled at Sim Muzzy. But with regard to Arnold Lamont I was less confident. There had been a world of philosophy in his brief remark that a man does not tell all he knows; and my fencing bout with him

was still too fresh in my mind to permit me actually to patronize him. He sat now with his thoughtful eyes intent on my uncle, and of the five of us he was by long odds the most composed.

Although I have betrayed my vanity in a none too flattering light, it would be unjust, I truly think, not to add, at the risk of seeming to contradict myself, that I was instinctively kind-hearted, and that I did not lack for courage.

"I have news for you, boys," Uncle Seth began, with a manner at once abrupt and a little pompous, but with a warm smile at me. "I hope you'll be glad to hear it, although it means a radical change in the life we've lived together for so many years. First of all, I want to say that each of you will be well looked after."

Uncle Seth paused and glanced at Cornelius Gleazen, who nodded as if to encourage him to go on.

"Yes, you will be well looked after, however it may appear at first flush. I'll see that no faithful man suffers to my profit, even though I have sold the store."

"What's that? You've sold the store?" Sim wildly broke in. "If you've — you've gone and sold the store? What — what?"

"Be still, Sim," Uncle Seth interposed. "Yes, I have sold the store. I know that Joe'll not be surprised to hear it; but even he has had only the vaguest hint of what's going forward. The gentleman who was here yesterday and to-day, has bought me out, store and house, lock, stock, and barrel."

"The house!" I cried.

"Yes," said Uncle Seth shortly.

"But what'll I do? And Arnold? And Joe?" Sim demanded. "Oh, Seth Upham! Never did I think to see this day and hear them words."

"I'm coming to that," said Uncle Seth. "There'll be room here for the three of you if you want to stay, and there'll be work in abundance in the store; but — ah, lads, here's the chance for you! — there'll be room for you with me, if you wish to come. I have bought a ship —"

"A brig," Cornelius Gleazen put in.

"A brig," said Uncle Seth, accepting the correction. "The Adventure, a very tidy little craft, and well named."

Cornelius Gleazen gave his cigar a harder flick and in a reminiscent voice again forced his way into the conversation. "Ninety-seven foot on deck, twenty-four foot beam, sixteen foot deep, and a good two hundred and fifty ton, built of white oak and copper fastened. Baltimore bow and beautiful rake. Trim as a gull and fast as a duck. Tidy's the word, Seth, tidy."

Gleazen's fingers were twitching and his eyes were strangely alight.

"Yes, yes," said Uncle Seth, sharply.

"But that's not all," Gleazen insisted.

"Well, what of it?" Uncle Seth demanded. "Are you going to tell 'em everything?"

At this Gleazen paused and looked hard at his cigar. His fingers, I could see, were twitching more than ever.

"No," he slowly said, "not everything. Go ahead, Seth."

"If you keep putting in, how can I go ahead."

"Oh, stow it!" Gleazen suddenly roared. "This is no piffling storekeeper's game. Go on!"

As you can imagine, we were all eyes and ears at this brush between the two; and when Gleazen lost his temper and burst out so hotly, in spite of my admiration for the man, I hoped, and confidently expected, to see Uncle Seth come back, hammer and tongs, and give him as good

as he sent. Instead, he suddenly turned white and became strangely calm, and in a low, subdued voice went on to the rest of us: —

"We shall take on a cargo at Boston and sail for the West Indies, where we shall add a few men to the crew and thence sail for Africa. I'm sure the voyage will yield a good profit and — "

"O Seth, O Seth!" cried Gleazen, abruptly. "That is no manner of way to talk to the boys. Let me tell 'em!"

My uncle, at this, drew back in his chair and said with great dignity, "Sir, whose money is financing this venture?"

"Money?" Gleazen roared with laughter. "What's money without brains? I'll tell 'em? You sit tight."

We were all but dumbfounded. White of face and blue of lip, Seth Upham sat in his chair — *his no longer!* — and Gleazen told us.

He threw his cigar-butt on the floor and stepped on it, and drummed on his beaver hat with nimble fingers.

"It's like this, lads," he said in a voice that implied that he was confiding in us: "I've come home here to Topham with a fortune, to be sure, and I've come to end my days in the town that gave me birth. But —" his voice now fell almost to a whisper — "I've left a king's wealth on the coast of Guinea."

He paused to see the effect of his words. I could hear my uncle breathing hard, but I held my eyes intently on Neil Gleazen's face.

"A fit treasure for an emperor!" he whispered, in such a way that the words came almost hissing to our ears.

Still we sat in silence and stared at him.

"With three good men to guard it," he went on after another pause. "Three tried, true men — friends of mine, every one of them. Suppose I *have* made my fortune and

come home to end my days in comfort? I'd as soon have a little more, *had n't you ?* And I'd as soon give a hand to a hard-working, honest boyhood friend, *had n't you ?* Here's what I done : I said to Seth Upham, who has robbed many a church with me —"

At that, I thought my uncle was going to cry out in protest or denial ; but his words died in his throat.

"I said to him, 'Seth, you and me is old friends. Now here's this little scheme. I've got plenty myself, so I'll gladly share with you. If you'll raise the money for this venture, you'll be helping three good men to get their little pile out of the hands of heathen savages, and half of the profits will be yours.' So he says he'll raise money for the venture, and he done so, and he's sold his store and his house, and now he can't back down. How about it, Seth?"

My uncle gulped, but made no reply. Gleazen, who up to this point had been always deferential and considerate, seemed, out of a clear sky, suddenly to have assumed absolute control of our united fortunes.

"Of course it won't do to turn off old friends," he continued. "So he made up his mind to give you lads your choice of coming with us at handsome pay — one third of his lay is to be divided amongst those of you that come —"

"No, I never said that," Uncle Seth cried, as if startled into speech.

"You never?" Gleazen returned in seeming amazement. "The papers is signed, Seth."

"But I never said that!"

Gleazen turned on my uncle, his eyes blazing. "This from you!" he cried with a crackling oath. "After all I've done! I swear *I 'll* back out now — then where'll you be? What's more, I'll tell what I know."

My uncle in a dazed way looked around the place that

up to now had been his own little kingdom and uttered some unintelligible murmur.

"Ah," said Gleazen, "I thought you did." Then, as if Uncle Seth had not broken in upon him, as if he had not retorted at Uncle Seth, as if his low, even voice had not been raised in pitch since he began, he went on, "Or, lads, you can stay. What do you say?"

Still we sat and stared at him.

Sim Muzzy, as usual, was first to speak and last to think. "I'll go," he exclaimed eagerly, "I'll go, for one."

"Good lad," said Gleazen, who, although they were nearly of an age, outrageously patronized him.

With my familiar world torn down about my shoulders, and the patrimony that I long had regarded as mine about to be imperiled in this strange expedition, it seemed that I must choose between a berth in the new vessel and a clerkship with no prospects. It was not a difficult choice for a youth with a leaning toward adventure, nor was I altogether unprepared for it. Then, too, there was something in me that would not suffer me lightly to break all ties with my mother's only brother. After a moment for reflection, I said, "I 'll go, for two."

Meanwhile, Arnold Lamont had been studying us all and had seen, I am confident, more than any of us. He had taken time to notice to the full the sudden return of all Cornelius Gleazen's arrogance and the extraordinary meekness of Uncle Seth who, without serious affront, had just now taken words from Gleazen for which he would once have blazed out at him in fury.

It did not take Arnold Lamont's subtlety to see that Gleazen, by some means or other, had got Seth Upham under his thumb and was taking keen pleasure in feeling him there. Gleazen's attitude toward my uncle had undergone a curious series of changes since the day when, for the

first time, I had seen him enter our store: from arrogance he had descended to courtesy, even to deference; but from deference he had now returned again to arrogance. In his attitude on that first day there had been much of the cool insolence that he now manifested; but after a few days it had seemed to a certain extent to have vanished. Rather, the consideration with which he had of late treated my uncle had been so great as to make this new impudence the more amazing.

Many things may have influenced Arnold in his decision; but among them, I think, were his gratitude to Uncle Seth, who had taken him in and given him a good living, and who, we both could see, was likely now to need the utmost that a friend could give him; his friendliness for Sim and me, with whom he had worked so long; and, which I did not at the time suspect, the desire of a keen, able, straightforward man to meet and beat Cornelius Gleazen at his own game.

"I will go with you," he quietly said.

"Good lads!" Gleazen cried.

"One thing more," said I.

"Anything — anything — within reason, aye, or without."

"Uncle Seth once spoke to me of selling out Abraham Guptil."

My uncle now bestirred himself and, shaking off the discomfiture with which he had received Gleazen's earlier words, said with something of his usual sharpness, "The sheriff has had the papers these three days."

"Then," I cried, "I beg you, as a favor, let him have a berth with us."

"What's that? Some farmer?" Gleazen demanded.

"He's bred to the sea," I returned.

"That puts another face on the matter," said Gleazen.

"Well," said my uncle. "But his lay comes out of the part that goes to you, then."

"But," I responded, "I thought of his signing on at regular wages." Then I blushed at my own selfishness and hastened to add, "Never mind that. I for one will say that he shall share alike with us."

And the others, knowing his plight, agreed as with a single voice.

"Now, then, my lads," Cornelius Gleazen cried, "a word in confidence: to the village and to the world we 'll say that we are going on a trading voyage. And so we are! All this rest of our talk," he continued slowly and impressively, "all this rest of our talk is a secret between you four and me and God Almighty." He brought his great fist down on the desk with a terrific bang. "If any one of you four men — I don't care a tinker's damn which one — lets this story leak, I'll kill him."

At the time I did not think that he meant it; since then I have come to think that he did.

CHAPTER VII

A WILD NIGHT

Unless you have lived in a little town where every man's business is his neighbor's, you cannot imagine the furor in the village of Topham when our fellow citizens learned that Seth Upham had actually sold his business and his house, and was to embark with Cornelius Gleazen on a voyage of speculation to the West Indies and Africa. The friction with Great Britain that had closed ports in the West Indies to American ships added zest to their surmises; and the unexpected news that that very worthy gentleman, Cornelius Gleazen, who had so recently returned to his old home, was so soon to depart again, sharpened their regrets. All were united in wishing us good fortune and a safe, speedy return; all were keenly interested in whatever hints of the true character of the voyage we let fall, which you can be sure were few and slender. It was such an extraordinary affair in the annals of the village, that the more enterprising began to prepare for a grand farewell, which should express their feelings in a suitable way and should do honor both to their respected fellow townsman, Seth Upham, and to their distinguished resident, Cornelius Gleazen.

There was to be a parade, with a band from Boston at its head, a great dinner at the town hall, to which with uncommon generosity they invited even the doubting blacksmith, and a splendid farewell ceremony, with speeches by the minister and the doctor, and with presentations to all who were to leave town. It was to mark an epoch in the history of Topham. Nothing like it had

ever taken place in all the country round. And as we were to go to Boston in the near future,— the man who had bought out Uncle Seth was to take over the house and store almost at once,— they set the date for the first Saturday in September.

Because I, in a way, was to be one of the guests of the occasion, I heard little of the plans directly, for they were supposed to be secret, in order to surprise us by their splendor. But a less curious lad than I could not have helped noticing the long benches carried past the store and the platform that was building on the green.

The formal farewell, as I have said, was to take place on the first Saturday in September, and the following Wednesday we five were to leave town. But meanwhile, in order to have everything ready for our departure, and because we needed another pair of hands to help in the work during the last days at the store, I went on Friday to get Abraham Guptil to join us.

He had been so pleased at the chance to ship for a voyage, thus to recover a little of the goods and gear that misfortune had swept away from him almost to the last stick and penny, that I was more than glad I had given him the chance. Well satisfied, accordingly, with myself and the world, I turned my uncle's team toward the home of Abe's father-in-law, where Mrs. Guptil and the boy were to stay until Abe should return from the voyage; and when I passed the green, where the great platform was almost finished, I thought with pleasure of what an important part I was to play in the ceremonies next day.

It was a long ride to the home of Abraham Guptil's father-in-law, and the way led through the pines and marshes beside the sea, and up hill and down valley over a winding road inland. The goldenrod beside the stone walls along the road was a bright yellow, and the blue

frost flowers were beginning to blossom. In the air, which was as clear as on a winter night, was the pleasant, almost indescribable tang of autumn, in which are blended so mysteriously the mellow odors of stubble fields and fallen leaves, and fruit that is ready for the market; it suggested bright foliage and mellow sunsets, and blue smoke curling up from chimneys, and lighted windows in the early dusk.

On the outward journey, but partly occupied by driving the well-broken team, I thought of how Neil Gleazen, before my very eyes, had at first frightened Uncle Seth, and had then cajoled him, and, finally, had completely won him over. I had never put it in so many words before, that Gleazen had got my uncle into such a state that he could do what he wished with him; but to me it was plain enough, and I suspected that Arnold Lamont saw it, too. Although I had watched Gleazen from the moment when he first began to accomplish the purpose toward which he had been plotting, I could not understand what power he held over Uncle Seth that had so changed my uncle's whole character. Then I fell to thinking of that remark, twice repeated, about robbing churches, and meditated on it while the horses quietly jogged along. Never, I thought, should the people of the town learn of my suspicions; they concerned a family matter, and I would keep them discreetly to myself.

It was touching to see Abraham Guptil bid farewell to his wife and son. Their grief was so unaffected that it almost set me sniffling, and I feared that poor Abe would make a dreary addition to our little band; but when we had got out of sight of the house, he began to pick up, and after wiping his eyes and blowing his nose, he surprised me by becoming, all things considered, quite lively.

"Now," said he, "you can tell me all about this voyage

for which I've shipped. It seems queer for a man to sign the articles when he don't know where his lay is coming from, but, I declare, it was a godsend to me to have a voyage and wages in prospect, and you were a rare good friend of mine, Joe, to put my name in like you done."

It puzzled me to know just how much to tell him, but I explained as well as I could that it was a trading voyage to the West Indies and Africa, and gave him a hint that there was a secret connected with it whereby, if all went well, we were to get large profits, and let him know that he was to share a certain proportion of this extra money with Arnold, Sim, and me, in addition to the wages that we all were to draw.

It seemed to satisfy him, and after thinking it over, he said, "I've heard Seth Upham was getting all his money together for some reason or other. There must be more than enough to buy the Adventure. He's been cashing in notes and mortgages all over the county, and I'm told the bank is holding it for him in gold coin."

"In gold!" I cried.

"Gold coin," he repeated. "It's rumored round the county that Neil Gleazen's holding something over him that's frightened him into doing this and that, exactly according to order."

"Where did you hear that?" I demanded.

It was so precisely what I myself had been thinking that it seemed as if I must have talked too freely; yet I knew that I had held my tongue.

"Oh, one place and another," he replied. Then, changing the subject, he remarked, "There 'll be a grand time in town to-morrow, what with speeches and all. I'd like to have brought my wife to see it, but I was afraid it would make it harder for her when I leave."

"She does n't want you to go?"

"Oh, she's glad for me to have the chance, but she's no hand to bear up at parting."

Conversing thus, we drove on into the twilight and falling dusk, till we came so near the town that we could see ahead of us the tavern, all alight and cheerful for the evening.

"I wonder," Abe cried eagerly, "who'll be sitting by the table with a hot supper in front of him, and Nellie Nuttles to fetch and carry."

I was hungry after my day's drive and could not help sharing Abe's desire for a meal at the tavern, which was known as far as Boston and beyond for its good food; but I had no permission thus wantonly to spend Uncle Seth's money, so I snapped the whip and was glad to hear the louder rattling of wheels as the horses broke into a brisk trot, which made our own supper seem appreciably nearer.

And who, indeed, would be sitting now behind those lighted windows? Abe's question came back to me as we neared the tavern. The broad roofs seemed to suggest the very essence of hospitality, and as if to indorse their promise of good fare, a roar of laughter came out into the night.

As we passed, I looked through one of the windows that but a moment since had been rattling from the mirth within, and saw — I looked again and made sure that I was not mistaken! — saw Neil Gleazen, red-faced and wild-eyed, standing by the bar with a glass raised in his hand.

The sight surprised me, for although Gleazen, like almost everyone else in old New England, took his wine regularly, in all the months since his return he had conducted himself so soberly that there had been not the slightest suggestion that he ever got himself the worse for liquor;

and even more it amazed me to see beside him one Jed Matthews who was, probably, the most unscrupulous member of the lawless crew with whom Gleazen was said to have associated much in the old days, but of whom he had seen, everyone believed, almost nothing since he had come home.

As we drove on past the blacksmith shop, I saw the smith smoking his pipe in the twilight.

"It's a fine evening," I called.

"It is," said he, coming into the road. And in a lower voice he added, "Did you see him when you passed the inn?"

"Yes," I replied, knowing well enough whom he meant.

"They've called me a fool," the smith responded, "but before this night's over we'll see who's a fool." He puffed away at his pipe and looked at me significantly. "We'll see who's a fool, I or them that has so much more money and wisdom than I."

He went back and sat down, and Abe and I drove on, puzzled and uncomfortable. The smith was vindictive. Could he, I wondered, be right?

A good supper was keeping hot for us in the brick oven, and we sat down to it with the good-will that it merited; but before we were more than half through, my uncle burst in upon us. He seemed harassed by anxiety, and went at once to the window, where he stood looking out into the darkness.

"Have you heard anything said around town?" he presently demanded, more sharply, it seemed to me, than ever.

"I've heard little since I got back," I returned. "Only the smith's ravings. He was in an ill temper as we passed. But I saw Neil Gleazen at the inn drinking with Jed Matthews."

"The ungrateful reprobate!" Uncle Seth cried with an

angry gesture. "He's drawn me into this thing hand and foot — hand and foot. I'm committed. It's too late to withdraw, and he knows it. And now, now for the first time, mind you, he's starting on one of his old sprees."

"He's not a hard drinker," I said. "In all the time he's been in Topham he's not been the worse for liquor, and this evening, so far as I could see, he was just taking a glass —"

"You don't know him as he used to be," my uncle cried.

"A glass," put in Abe Guptil; "but with Jed Matthews!"

"You've hit the nail on the head," Uncle Seth burst out — "with Jed Matthews. God save we're ruined by this night's work. If he should go out to Higgleby's barn with that gang of thieves, my good name will go too. I swear I'll sell the brig."

Uncle Seth wildly paced the room and scowled until every testy wrinkle on his face was drawn into one huge knot that centred in his forehead.

The only sounds, as Abe and I sat watching him in silence, were the thumping of his feet as he walked and the hoarse whisper of his breathing. Plainly, he was keyed up to a pitch higher than ever I had seen him.

At that moment, from far beyond the village, shrilly but faintly, came a wild burst of drunken laughter. It was a single voice and one strange to me. There was something devilish in its piercing, unrestrained yell.

"Merciful heavens!" Uncle Seth cried,— actually his hand was shaking like the palsy; a note of fear in his strained voice struck to my heart like a finger of ice,— "I'd know that sound if I heard it in the shrieking of hell; and I have not heard Neil Gleazen laugh like that in thirty years. Come, boys, maybe we can stop him before it's too late."

Thrusting his fingers through his hair so that it stood out on all sides in disorder, he wildly dashed from the room.

Springing up, Abe and I followed him outdoors and down the road. We ran with a will, but old though he was, a frenzy of fear and anxiety and shame led him on at a pace we could scarcely equal. Down the long road into town we ran, all three, breathing harder and harder as we went, past the store, the parsonage, and the church, and past the smithy, where someone called to us and hurried out to stop us.

It was the smith, who loomed up big and black and ominous in the darkness.

"They've gone," he said, "they've gone to Higgleby's barn."

"Who?" my uncle demanded. "Who? Say who! For heaven's sake don't keep me here on tenterhooks!"

"Neil Gleazen," said the smith, "and Jed Matthews and all the rest. Ah, you would n't listen to *me*."

"And all the rest!" Uncle Seth echoed weakly.

For a moment he reeled as if bewildered, even dazed. Whatever it was that had come over him, it seemed to have pierced to some unsuspected weakness in the fibre of the man, some spot so terribly sensitive that he was fairly crazed by the thrust. To Abe and me, both of us shocked and appalled, he turned with the madness of despair in his eyes.

"Boys," he said hoarsely, "we've got to be ready to leave. Call Sim and Arnold! Hitch up the horses! Pack my bag and — and, Joe," — he laid his hand on my shoulder and whispered in my ear, a mere trembling breath of a whisper, — "here's the key to the house safe. Pack all that's in it in the bed of the wagon while the others are busy elsewhere. O Joe! what a wretched man I am! Why

in heaven's name could he not walk straight for just one day more?"

Why, indeed? I thought. But I remembered Higgleby's barn, and in my own heart I knew the reason. Secretly, all this time, Neil Gleazen had been hand in glove with his old disreputable cronies; now that he had got Uncle Seth so far committed to this new venture that he could not desert it, Gleazen was entirely willing to throw away his hard-won reputation for integrity, for the sake of one farewell fling with the "old guard."

"Go, lads," Uncle Seth cried; "go quickly." He rested a shaking hand on my arm as Abe turned away. "My poor, poor boy!" he murmured. "I've meant to do so well by you, Joey! Heaven keep us all!"

"But you?" I asked.

"I'm going, if I can, to bring Neil Gleazen back before it is too late," Uncle Seth replied. And with that he set off into the darkness.

As we turned back to the store to rouse up Arnold and Sim, I caught a glimpse of the stark white platform on the green, which was visible even in the darkness, and ironically I thought of the farewell ceremonies that were to take place next day.

I shall never forget how the store looked that night, as Abe and I came hurrying up to it. The shadows on the porch were as black as ink, and the shuttered windows seemed to stare like the sightless eyes of a blind man who hears a familiar voice and turns as if to see whence it comes. From the windows of the room above, which Arnold and Sim occupied, there shone a few thin shafts of light along the edges of the shades, and the window frames divided the shades themselves into small yellow squares, on which a shadow came and went as one of the men moved about the room.

In reply to our cries and knocks, Arnold raised the curtain and we saw first his head, then Sim's, black against the lighted room.

"Who is there?" he called, "and what's wanted?"

Almost before we had finished pouring out our story, Arnold was downstairs and fumbling at the bolts of the door; and as we entered the dark store, Sim, his shoes in his hand, followed him, even more than usually grotesque in the light from above.

"My friends," said Arnold, calmly, "let us now, all four, prove to ourselves and to Seth Upham, the mettle that is in us."

We lost no time in idle speculation. Dividing among us all that was to be done, we fell to with a will. Working like men possessed, we packed our own possessions and Uncle Seth's, both at the store and at the barn; and while the others were still busy in the carriage-shed, I hurried back to the house and opened the safe, and brought out bags of money and papers and heaven knows what, and as secretly as possible packed them in the bottom of the wagon. For three hours we toiled at one place and the other; then, hot, tired, excited, apprehensive of we knew not what, we rested by the wagon and waited.

"I never heard of anything so rattle-headed in all my life," Sim Muzzy cried, when he had caught his breath. "Seth Upham gets crazier every day. Here all's ready for the grand farewell to-morrow and all of us to be there, and not one of us to leave town until next week, and yet he gets us up at all hours of the night as if we was to start come sunrise. I'm not going to run away at such an hour, I can tell you. Why it may be they'll call on me to make a speech! Who knows?"

"We'll be lucky, I fear," said Arnold Lamont, "if we do not start before sunrise."

"Before sunrise! Well, I'll have you know —"

I simply could not endure Sim's interminable talk. "Watch the goods and the wagon, you three," I said. "I'm going to look for Uncle Seth and see what he wants us to do next."

Before they could object, I had left them sitting by the wagon and the harnessed horses, ready for no one knew what, and had made off into the night. Having done all that I could to carry out my uncle's orders, I had no intention of returning until I had solved the mystery of Higgleby's barn.

I hurried along and used every short cut that I knew; and though I now stumbled in the darkness, now fell headlong on the dewy grass, now barked my shins as I scrambled over a barway, I made reasonably good progress, all things considered, and came in less than half an hour to the pasture where Higgleby's lonely barn stood. The door of the barn, as I saw it from a distance, was open and made a rectangle of yellow light against the black woods beyond it. When I listened, I heard confused voices. As I was about to advance toward the barn, a certain note in the voices warned me that a quarrel was in progress. I hesitated and stopped where I was, wondering whether to go forward or not, and there I heard a strange sound and saw a strange sight.

First there came a much louder outcry than any that had gone before; then the light in the barn suddenly went out; then I heard the sound of running back and forth; then the light appeared again, but flickering and unsteady; then a single harsh yell came all the way across the dark pasture; then the light grew and grew and grew.

It threw its rays out over the pasture land and revealed men running about like ants around a newly destroyed hill. A tongue of flame crept out of one window and

crawled up the side of the old building. A great wave of fire came billowing out of the door. Sparks began to fly and the roar and crackling grew louder and louder.

As I breathlessly ran toward the barn, from which now I could see little streams of fire flowing in every direction through the dry grass, I suddenly became aware that there was someone ahead of me, and by stopping short I narrowly escaped colliding with two men whom, with a sudden shock, I recognized as my uncle and Neil Gleazen.

"Uncle Seth!" I gasped out.

Nothing then, I think, could have surprised Seth Upham. There was only relief in his voice when he cried, "Quick, Joe, quick, take his other arm."

Obediently, if reluctantly, I turned my back on the conflagration behind us, and locking my right arm through Neil Gleazen's left, helped partly to drag him, partly to carry him toward the village and the tavern.

"I showed the villains!" Gleazen proclaimed thickly. "The scoundrels! The despicable curs! I showed them how a gentlemen replies to such as them. I showed them, eh, Seth?"

"Yes, yes, Neil! Hush! Be still! There are people coming. Merciful heavens! That fire will bring the whole town out upon us."

"I showed them, the villains! the scoundrels! the despicable curs! They are not used to the ways of gentlemen, eh, Seth?"

"Yes, yes, but do be still! *Do, do* be still!"

"I showed them how a gentleman acts — "

The man was as drunk as a lord, but in his thick ravings there was a fixed idea that sent a thrill of apprehension running through me.

"Uncle Seth," I gasped, "Uncle Seth, *what has he done?*"

"Quick! quick! We must hurry!"

"What has he done?"

"Come, come, Joe, never mind that now!"

For the moment I yielded, and we stumbled along, arm in arm, with Gleazen now all but a dead weight between us.

"I showed them!" he cried again. "I showed them!"

I simply could not ignore the strange muttering in his voice.

"Tell me," I cried. "Uncle Seth, tell me what he has done."

"Not yet! Not yet!"

"Tell me!"

"Not yet!"

"Or I'll not go another step!"

My uncle gasped and staggered. My importunity seemed to be one thing more than he could bear, poor man! and even in my temper, pity sobered me and cooled my anger. For a moment he touched my wrist. His hand was icy cold. But his face, when I looked at him, was set and hard, and my temper flashed anew.

"Not another step! Tell me."

Glancing apprehensively about, my uncle gasped in a hoarse undertone, "He has killed Jed Matthews."

As people were appearing now on all sides and running to fight the fire, Uncle Seth and I tried our best to lead Gleazen into a by-path and so home by a back way; but with drunken obstinacy he refused to yield an inch. "No, no," he roared, "I'm going to walk home past all the people. I'm not afraid of them. If they say aught to me, I'll show 'em."

So back we marched, supporting between us, hatless but with the diamonds still flashing on his finger and in his stock, that maudlin wretch, Cornelius Gleazen. I felt

my own face redden as the curious turned to stare at us, and for Uncle Seth it was a sad and bitter experience; but we pushed on as fast as we could go, driven always by fear of what would follow when the people should learn the whole story of the brawl in the burning barn.

Back into the village we came, now loitering for a moment in the deeper shadows to avoid observation, now pushing at top speed across a lighter open space, always dragging Cornelius Gleazen between us, and so up to the open door of the tavern.

"Now," murmured Uncle Seth, "heaven send us help! Neil, Neil — Neil, I say!"

"Well?"

"We must get your chests and run. Your money, your papers — are they packed?"

"Money? What money?"

"Your fortune! You can never come back here. Sober up, Neil, sober up! You killed Jed Matthews."

"Served him right. Despicable cur, villain, scoundrel! I'll show them."

"Neil, Neil Gleazen!" cried my uncle, now all but frantic.

"Well, I hear you."

"Oh, oh, will he not listen to reason? Take his arm again, Joe."

We lifted him up the steps and led him into the inn, and there in the door of the bar-room came face to face with the landlord, who was hot with anger.

"Don't bring him in here, Mr. Upham," he cried; "I keep no house for sots and swine."

"What!" gasped my uncle, "you'll not receive him?"

"Not I!"

"But what's come over you? *But you never would treat Mr. Gleazen like this!*"

"But, but, but!" the landlord snarled. "This very night he threw my good claret in my own face and called it a brew for pigs. Let him seek his lodgings elsewhere."

"Where are his chests, then?" my uncle demanded. "We'll take his chests and go."

"Not till he's paid my bill."

For a moment we stood at deadlock, Uncle Seth and I, with Gleazen between us, and the landlord in the bar-room door. Every sound from outside struck terror to us lest the village had discovered the worst; lest at any moment we should have the people about our ears. But the landlord, who, of course, knew nothing of what had been going forward all this time, and Gleazen, who seemed too drunk to care, were imperturbable, until Gleazen raised his head and with inflamed eyes stared at the man.

"Who 's a swine?" he demanded. "Who 's a sot?"

Lurching forward, he broke away from us and crashed against the landlord and knocked him into the bar-room, whither he himself followed.

"You blackfaced bla'guard!" the landlord cried; and, raising a chair, he started to bring it down on Gleazen's head.

I had thought that the man was too drunk to move quickly, but now, as if a new brawl were all that he needed to bring him again to his faculties, he stepped back like a flash and raised his hand.

A sharp, hook-like instrument used to pull corks was kept stuck into the beam above his head, where, so often was it used, it had worn a hollow place nearly as big as a bowl. This he seized and, holding it like a foil, lunged at the landlord as the chair descended.

The chair struck Gleazen on the head and knocked him down, but the cork-puller went into the landlord's shoulder, and when Gleazen, clutching it as he fell, pulled it out

again, the hooked end tore a great hole in the muscles, from which blood spurted.

Clapping his hand to the wound, the landlord went white and leaned back against the bar; but Gleazen, having received a blow that might have killed a horse, got up nimbly and actually appeared to be sobered by the shock. Certainly he thought clearly and spoke to a purpose.

"Now, by heaven!" he cried, "I *have* got to leave town. Come, Seth, come, Joe."

"But your chests! Your money!" my uncle repeated in a dazed way. The events of the night were quite too much for his wits.

"Let him keep them for the bill," said Gleazen with a harsh laugh. "Come, I say!"

"But — but — "

"Come! Hear that?"

"Watch the back door," someone was crying. "He's probably dead drunk, but he's a dangerous man and we can't take chances."

It was the constable's voice.

Gleazen was already running through the long hall, and we followed him at our best speed.

As we left the room, the landlord fell and carried down with a crash a table on which a tray of glasses was standing. I would have stayed to help him, but I knew that other help was near, and to tell the truth I was beginning to fear the consequences of even so slight a part as mine had been in the ghastly happenings of the night. So I followed the others, and we noiselessly slipped away through the orchard, just as the men sent to guard the back door came hurrying round the house and took their stations.

With the distant fire flaming against the sky, with the smell of smoke stinging in our nostrils, and with the clamor

Clapping his hand to the wound the landlord went white and leaned back against the bar.

of the aroused town sounding on every side, we hurried, unobserved, through dark fields and orchards, to my uncle's house, where Arnold and Sim and Abe were impatiently waiting.

They started up from beside the wagon as we drew near, and crowded round us with eager questions. But there was no time for mere talking. Already we could hear voices approaching, although as yet they were not dangerously near.

"Come, boys," my uncle cried, "into the wagon, every one. Come, Neil, come — for heaven's sake — "

"Be still, Seth, I am sober."

"Sober!" Uncle Seth put a world of disgust into the word.

"Yes, sober, curse you."

"Very well, but do climb in — "

"Climb in? I'll climb in when it suits my convenience."

Jostling and scrambling, we were all in the wagon at last. Uncle Seth held reins and whip; Neil Gleazen, who was squeezed in between him and me on the seat, snored loudly; and the others, finding such seats as they could on boxes or the bed of the wagon, endured their discomfort in silence.

The whip cracked, the horses started forward, the wheels crunched in gravel and came out on the hard road. Turning our backs on the village of Topham, we left behind us the benches on the green, the fine new platform, the banquet that was already half prepared, and all our anticipations of the great farewell.

We went up the long hill, from the summit of which we could see the lights of the town shining in the dark valley, the great flare of fire at the burning barn, and the country stretching for miles in every direction, and thence we drove rapidly away.

Thus, for the second time, twenty years after the first, Cornelius Gleazen left his native town as a fugitive from justice. But this time the fortunes of five men were bound up with his, and we whom he was leading on his mad quest knew now only too well what we could expect of our drunken leader.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BRIG ADVENTURE

We drove for a long time in silence, with the jolting of the chaise and the terrible scenes behind us to occupy our minds; and I assure you it was a grim experience. In all the years that have intervened I have never been able to escape from the memory of the burning barn, with the dark figures running this way and that; the shrill cries of Cornelius Gleazen, staring drunk, and his talk of the man he had killed; the landlord at the tavern, with the blood spurting from his shoulder where the hook had pulled through the flesh.

In a night the whole aspect of the world had changed. From a care-free, selfish, heedless youth, put to work despite his wish to linger over books, I had become of a sudden a companion of criminals, haunted by terrible memories, and through no fault of my own. After all, I thought, by whose fault was it? Cornelius Gleazen's, to be sure. But by whose fault was I forced to accompany Cornelius Gleazen in his flight? Certainly I was guiltless of any unlawful act — for that matter, we all were, except Gleazen. I had not a jot of sympathy for him, yet so completely had he interwoven our affairs with his that, although the man was a drunken beast, we dared not refuse to share his flight. By whose fault? I again asked myself.

For a while I would not accept the answer that came to me. It seemed disloyal to a well-meaning man who at one time and another had given a thousand evidences of his real affection for me, which underlay the veneer of sharpness and irascibility that he presented to the world at

large. It seemed to me that I could hear him saying again, "You're all I've got, Joey; you're all that's left to the old man and I'm going to do well by you —"; that I could hear again the clink of gold thrown down before me on the table; that I could feel his hand again on my shoulder, his voice again trembling with despair when he cried, "I've meant to do so well by you, Joey! But now — heaven keep us all!" Yet, as we jounced away over that rough road and on into the night, and as I thought of things that one and another had said, I felt more and more confident that at bottom Seth Upham was to blame for our predicament. To be sure, he had *meant* well, even in this present undertaking; and though he was said to drive sharp bargains, he lived, I well knew, an honest life. Yet I was convinced that at some time in the past he must have been guilty of some sin or other that gave Neil Gleazen his hold over him. It fairly staggered me to think of the power for good or evil that lies in every act in a man's life. To be sure, had Seth Upham been a really strong man, he would have lived down his mistake long since, whatever it might have been, and would have defied Gleazen to do his worst. But the crime, if such there was, was his, none the less; and that it was the seed whence had sprung our great misfortunes, I was convinced.

Looking back at Arnold Lamont, I caught his eye by the light of the rising moon and found great comfort in his steady glance. As if to reassure me further, he laid his hand on my arm and slightly pressed it.

On and on and on we drove, past towns and villages, over bridges and under arching trees, beside arms of the sea and inland ponds, until, as dawn was breaking, we came down the road into Boston, with the waters of the Charles River and of the Back Bay on our left and Beacon Hill before us.

Here and there in the town early risers were astir, and the smoke climbed straight up from their chimneys; but for the most part the people were still asleep, and the shops that we passed were still shuttered, except one that an apprentice at that very moment was opening for the day. Down to the wharves we drove, whence we could see craft of every description, both in dock and lying at anchor; and there we fell into a lively discussion.

As the horses stopped, Gleazen woke, and that he was sick and miserable a single glance at his face revealed.

"Well," said he, "there's the brig."

"Yes," Uncle Seth retorted, "and if you had kept away from Higgleby's barn, we'd not have seen her for a week to come. We've got you out of that scrape with a whole skin, and I swear we've done well."

"It was *sub rosa*," Gleazen responded thickly, "only *sub rosa*, mind you. Under the rose — you know, Seth."

"Yes, I know. If I had had my wits about me, you would never have pulled the wool over my eyes."

Gleazen laughed unpleasantly. It was plain that he was in an evil temper, and Uncle Seth, worn and harassed by the terrible experiences of the night, was in no mood to humor him. So we sat in the wagon on a wharf by the harbor, where the clean salt water licked at the piling and rose slowly with the incoming tide, while our two leaders bickered together.

At last, in anger, Seth Upham cried: "I swear I'll not go. I'll hold back the brig. I'll keep my money. You shall hang."

Gleazen laughed a low laugh that was more threatening by far than if as usual he had laughed with a great roar. "No, you don't, Seth," he quietly said. "You know the stakes that you've put up and you know that the winnings will be big. I've used you right, and you're not going

to go back on me now — *not while I know what I know!* There's them that would open their eyes to hear it, Seth. I've bore the blame for thirty years, but the end's come if you try to go back on me now."

I looked at my uncle and saw that his face was white. His fingers were twisting back and forth and he seemed not to know what to say; but at last he nodded and said, "All right, Neil," and got down from the wagon; and we all climbed out and stretched our stiff muscles.

"Here's a boat handy," Gleazen cried.

Uncle Seth cut the painter, and drawing her up to a convenient ladder, we began to carry down our various belongings, finishing with the big bags that hours before I had packed so carefully in the bottom of the wagon. Neil Gleazen then seated himself in the stern sheets, Abe Guptil took the oars, and I climbed into the bow.

As Uncle Seth was coming on board, Sim Muzzy stopped him.

"What about the horses?" he exclaimed. "You ain't going off to leave them, are you? Not with wagon and all. Why, they must be worth a deal of money; they — "

"Come, come, you prattling fool," Gleazen called.

Uncle Seth, after reflecting a moment, added sharply, "They'll maybe go to pay for the boat we're taking. I don't like to steal, but now I see no way out. Quick! I hear steps."

So down came Sim, and out into the harbor we rowed; and when I turned to look, I saw close at hand for the first time the brig Adventure.

She was a trim, well-proportioned craft, with a grace of masts and spars and a neatness of rigging and black and white paint that quite captivated me, although coming from what was virtually an inland town, I was by no means qualified to pass judgment on her merits; and I was

not too weary to be glad to know that she, of all vessels in the harbor, was the one in which we were to sail.

When a sleepy sailor on deck called, "Boat ahoy!" Gleazen gave him better than he sent with a loud, "Ahoy, Adventure!"

Then we came up to her and swung with the tide under her chains, until a couple of other sailors came running to help us get our goods aboard; then up we scrambled, one at a time, and set the boat adrift.

I now found myself on a neat clean deck, and was taken with the buckets and pins and coiled ropes lying in tidy fakes — but I should say, too, that I was so tired after my long night ride that I could scarcely keep my eyes open, so that I paid little attention to what was going on around me until I heard Uncle Seth saying, "And this, Captain North, is my nephew. If there are quarters for him aft, I'll be glad, of course."

"Of course, sir, of course," the captain replied; and I knew when I first heard his voice that I was going to like him. "If he and the Frenchman — Lamont you say's his name? — can share a stateroom, I've one with two berths. Good! And you say we must sail at once? Hm! In half an hour wind and tide will be in our favor. We're light of ballast, but if we're careful, I've no doubt it will be safe. We must get some fresh water. But that we can hurry up. Hm! I had n't expected sailing orders so soon; but in an hour's time, Mr. Upham, if it's necessary, I can weigh anchor."

"Good!" cried Uncle Seth.

"Mr. Severance," Captain North called, "take five men and the cutter for the rest of the fresh water, and be quick about it. Willie, take Mr. Woods and Mr. Lamont below and show them to the stateroom the lady passengers had when we came up from Rio. Now then, Guptil, you take

your bag forward and stow it in the forecastle, and if you're hungry, tell the cook I said to give you a good cup of coffee and a plate of beans."

As with Arnold Lamont I followed Willie MacDougald, the little cabin boy, I was too tired to care a straw about life on board a ship; and before I should come on deck again, I was to be too sick. But as I threw myself into one of the berths in our tiny cubby, I welcomed the prospect of at least a long sleep, and I told Arnold how sincerely glad I was that we were to be together.

"Joe," he said, slowly and precisely, "I am very much afraid that we are going on a wild-goose chase. Seth Upham has been kind to me in his own way. He is one of the few friends I have in this world. Now, I think, he would gladly be rid of me. But I shall stay with him to the end, for I think the time is coming when he will need his friends."

I am afraid I fell asleep before Arnold finished what he had to say; but weary though I was, I felt even then a great confidence in this quiet, restrained man. He was so wise, so unfathomable. And I felt already the growing determination, which, before we had seen the last of Neil Gleazen, was to absorb almost my very life, to work side by side with Arnold Lamont in order to save what we could of Uncle Seth's happiness and property from the hands of the man who, we both saw, had got my poor uncle completely in his power.

CHAPTER IX

AN OLD SEA SONG

The noise of the crew as they catted the anchor and made sail must have waked me more than once, for to this very day I remember hearing distinctly the loud chorus of a chantey, the trampling of many feet, the creaking and rattling and calling — the strange jumble of sounds heard only when a vessel is getting under way. But strange and interesting though it all was, I must immediately have fallen asleep again each time, for the memories come back to me like strange snatches of a vivid dream, broken and disconnected, for all that they are so clear.

When at last, having slept my sleep out, I woke with no inclination to close my eyes again, and sat up in my berth, the brig was pitching and rolling in a heavy sea, and a great wave of sickness engulfed me, such as I had never experienced. How long it lasted, I do not know, but at the time it seemed like months and years.

Perhaps, had I been forced to go on deck and work aloft, and eat coarse sea-food, and meet my sickness like a man, I might have thrown it off in short order and have got my sea-legs as soon as another. But coming on board as the owner's nephew, with a stateroom at my command, I lay and suffered untold wretchedness, now thinking that I was getting better, now relapsing into agonies that seemed to me ten times worse than before. Uncle Seth himself, I believe, was almost as badly off, and Arnold Lamont and Willie MacDougald had a time of it tending us. Even Arnold suffered a touch of sickness at first; but

recovering from it promptly, he took Uncle Seth and me in his charge and set Willie jumping to attend our wants, which he did with a comical alacrity that under other circumstances would mightily have amused me.

I took what satisfaction I could in being able to come on deck two days before Uncle Seth would stir from his bunk; but even then I was good for nothing except to lie on a blanket that Arnold and Willie spread for me, or to lean weakly against the rail.

But now, as I watched the blue seas through which the keen bow of the brig, a Baltimore craft of clipper lines, swiftly and smoothly cut its course, the great white sails, with every seam drawn to a taut, clean curve by the wind, the occasional glimpses of low land to the west, and the succession of great clouds that swept across the blue sky like rolling masses of molten silver, I fell to thinking in a dull, bewildered way of all that we had left behind.

How long would it be, I wondered, before someone would take charge of the horses we had left on the wharf in Boston? I could imagine the advertisement that would appear in the paper, and the questions of the people, until news should come from Topham of all that had happened. Who then, I wondered, would get the team?

Well, all that was done with, and we were embarked on our great adventure. What was to become of us, no human prophet could foretell.

Cornelius Gleazen, who years before had got over his last attack of seasickness, welcomed me on deck, with rough good-nature; but something in his manner told me that, from this time on, in his eyes I was one of the crowd, no further from his favor, perhaps, than any of the others, but certainly no nearer it.

To me, so weak from my long sickness that I could scarcely stand unaided, this came like a blow, even al-

though I had completely lost my admiration for the man. I had been so sure of his friendly interest! So confident of my own superiority! As I thought of it, I slowly came to see that his kindness and flattery had been but a part of his deep and well-considered plan to work into the confidence of my uncle; that since he had secured his hold upon Seth Upham and all his worldly goods, I, vain, credulous youth, might, for all he cared, sink or swim.

"Well," he would say carelessly, "how's the lad this morning?" And when I would reply from the depths of my misery, he would respond briefly, as he strolled away, "Better pull yourself together. There's work ahead for all hands."

It was not in his words, you understand, that I found indication of his changed attitude,— he was always a man of careless speech,— but in his manner of saying them. The tilt of his head, and his trick of not looking at me when he spoke and when I replied, told me as plainly as direct speech could have done that, having gained whatever ends he had sought by flattery, he cared not a straw whether I came with him or followed my own inclinations to the opposite end of the earth.

So we sailed, south, until we entered the Straits of Florida. Now we saw at a distance great scarlet birds flying in a row. Now schools of porpoises played around us. Now a big crane, speckled brown and white, alighted on our rigging. Now we passed green islands, now sandy shoals where the sea rose into great waves and crashed down in cauldrons of foam. And now we sighted land and learned that it was Cuba.

All this time I had constantly been gaining strength, and though more than once we had passed through spells of rough weather, I had had no return of seasickness. It was natural, therefore, that I should take an increasing inter-

est in all that went on around me. With some of the sailors I established myself on friendly terms, although others seemed to suspect me of attempting to patronize them; and thanks to the tutelage of Captain North, I made myself familiar with the duties of the crew and with the more common evolutions of a sailing ship. But in all that voyage only one thing came to my notice that gave any suggestion of what was before us, and that suggestion was so vague that at the time I did not suspect how significant it was.

In the first dog watch one afternoon, the carpenter, who had a good voice and a good ear for music, got out his guitar and, after strumming a few chords, began to sing a song so odd that I set my mind on remembering it, and later wrote the words down:

"Old King Mungo-Hungo-Ding
A barracoon he made,
And sold his blessed subjects to
A captain in the trade.
And when his subjects all were gone,
Oh, what did Mungo do?
He drove his wives and daughters in
And traded for them, too."

He sang it to a queer tune that caught my feet and set them twitching, and it was no surprise to see three or four sailors begin to shuffle about the deck in time to the music.

As the carpenter took up the chorus, they, too, began to sing softly and to dance a kind of a hornpipe; but, I must confess, I was surprised to hear someone behind me join in the singing under his breath. The last time when I had heard that voice singing was in the village church in Topham, and unless my memory serves me wrong, it then had sung that good hymn:—

"No, I shall envy them no more, who grow profanely great ;
Though they increase their golden store, and shine in robes of state."

It was Cornelius Gleazen, who, it appeared, knew both words and tune of the carpenter's song :—

"Tally on the braces! Heave and haul in time !
Four and twenty niggers and all of them was prime !
Old King Mungo's daughters, they bought our lasses rings.
Heave now ! Pull now ! They never married kings."

They sang on and on to the strumming of the guitar, while all the rest stood around and watched them; and when they had finished the song, which told how King Mungo, when he had sold his family as well as his subjects, made a raid upon his neighbors and was captured in his turn and, very justly, was himself sold as a slave, Cornelius Gleazen cried loudly, "*Encore ! Encore !*" and clapped his hands, until the carpenter, with a droll look in his direction, again began to strum his guitar and sang the song all over.

As I have said, at the time I attributed little significance to Cornelius Gleazen's enthusiasm for the song or to the look that the carpenter gave him. But when I saw Captain North staring from one to the other and realized that he had seen and heard only what I had, I wondered why he wore so queer an expression, and why, for some time to come, he was so grave and stiff in his dealings with both Gleazen and Uncle Seth. Nor did it further enlighten me to see that Arnold Lamont and Captain North exchanged significant glances.

So at last we came to the mouth of Havana harbor, and you can be sure that when, after lying off the castle all night, we set our Jack at the main as signal for a pilot, and passed through the narrow strait between Moro Castle and

the great battery of La Punta, and came to anchor in the vast and beautiful port where a thousand ships of war might have lain, I was all eyes for my first near view of a foreign city.

On every side were small boats plying back and forth, some laden with freight of every description, from fresh fruit to nondescript, dingy bales, others carrying only one or two passengers or a single oarsman. There were scores of ships, some full of stir and activity getting up anchor and making sail, others seeming half asleep as they lay with only a drowsy anchor watch. On shore, besides the grand buildings and green avenues and long fortifications, I could catch here and there glimpses of curious two-wheeled vehicles, of men and women with bundles on their heads, of countless negroes lolling about on one errand or another, and, here and there, of men on horseback. I longed to hurry ashore, and when I saw Uncle Seth and Neil Gleazen deep in conversation, I had great hopes that I should accomplish my desire. But something at that moment put an end for the time being to all such thoughts.

Among the boats that were plying back and forth I saw one that attracted my attention by her peculiar manœuvres. A negro was rowing her at the command of a big dark man, who leaned back in the stern and looked sharply about from one side to the other. Now he had gone beyond us, but instead of continuing, he came about and drew nearer.

He wore his hair in a pig-tail, an old fashion that not many men continued to observe, and on several fingers he wore broad gold rings. His face was seamed and scarred. There were deep cuts on cheek and chin, which might have been either scars or natural wrinkles, and across his forehead and down one cheek were two white lines that must have been torn in the first place by some weapon or mis-

sile. His hands were big and broad and powerful, and there was a grimly determined air in the set of his head and the thin line of his mouth that made me think of him as a man I should not like to meet alone in the dark.

From the top of his round head to the soles of his feet, his whole body gave an impression of great physical strength. His jaws and chin were square and massive; his bull neck sloped down to great broad shoulders, and his deep chest made his long, heavy arms seem to hang away from his body. As he lay there in the stern of the boat, with every muscle relaxed, yet with great swelling masses standing out under his skin all over him, I thought to myself that never in all my life had I seen so powerful a man.

Now he leaned forward and murmured something to the negro, who with a stroke of his oars deftly brought the boat under the stern of the Adventure and held her there. Then the man, smiling slightly, amazed me by calling in a voice so soft and gentle and low that it seemed almost effeminate: "Neil Gleazen! Neil Gleazen!"

The effect on Cornelius Gleazen was startling almost beyond words. Springing up and staring from one side to the other as if he could not believe his ears, he roared furiously: "By the Holy! Molly Matterson, where are you?"

Then the huge bull of a man, speaking in that same low, gentle voice, said; "So you know me, Neil?"

"Know you? I'd know your voice from Pongo River to Penzance," Gleazen replied, whirling about and leaning far over the taffrail.

The big man laughed so lightly that his voice seemed almost to tinkle. "You're eager, Neil," he said. Then he glanced at me and spoke again in a language that I could not understand. At the time I had no idea what it was, but

since then I have come to know well — too well — that it was Spanish.

And all the time my uncle stood by with a curiously wistful expression. It was as if he felt himself barred from their council; as if he longed to be one of them, hand in glove, and yet felt that there was between him and them a gap that he could not quite bridge; as if with his whole heart he had given himself and everything that was his, as indeed he had, only to receive a cold welcome. Remembering how haughtily Uncle Seth himself had but a little while ago regarded the good people of Topham, how seldom he had expressed even the very deep affection in which he held me, his only sister's only son, I marveled at the simple, frank eagerness with which he now watched those two; and since anyone could see that of him they were thinking lightly, if at all, I felt for him a pang of sympathy.

For a while the two talked together. Now they glanced at me, now at the others. I am confident that they told no secrets, for of course there was always the chance that some of us might speak the tongue, too. But that they talked more freely than they would have talked in English, I was very confident.

At last Gleazen said, "Come aboard at all events."

Instead of going around to the chains, the big man whom Gleazen had hailed as Molly Matterson stood up in the boat, crouched slightly, and leaping straight into the air, caught the taffrail with one hand. Gracefully, easily, he lifted himself by that one hand to the rail, placed his other hand upon it, where his gold rings gleamed dully, and lightly vaulted to the deck.

I now saw better what a huge man he was, for he towered above us all, even Neil Gleazen, and he seemed almost as broad across the chest as any two of us.

He gently shook hands with Uncle Seth and Captain North, to whom Gleazen introduced him, again glanced curiously at the rest of us, and then stepped apart with Gleazen and Uncle Seth. I could hear only a little of what they said, and the little that I did hear was concerned with unfamiliar names and mysterious things.

I saw Arnold Lamont watching them, too, and remembering how they had talked in a strange language, I wished that Arnold might have appeared to know what they had been saying. Well as I thought I knew Arnold, it never occurred to me that he might have known and, for reasons of his own, have held his tongue.

Of one thing I was convinced, however; the strange talk that was now going on was no such puzzle to Captain Gideon North as to me. The more he listened, the more his lips twitched and the more his frown deepened. It was queer, I thought, that he should appear to be so quick-tempered as to show impatience because he was not taken into their counsel. He had seemed so honest and fair-minded and generous that I had not suspected him of any such pettiness.

Presently Gleazen turned about and said loudly, "Captain North, we are going below to have a glass of wine together. Will you come?"

The captain hesitated, frowned, and then, as if he had suddenly made up his mind that he might as well have things over soon as late, stalked toward the companionway.

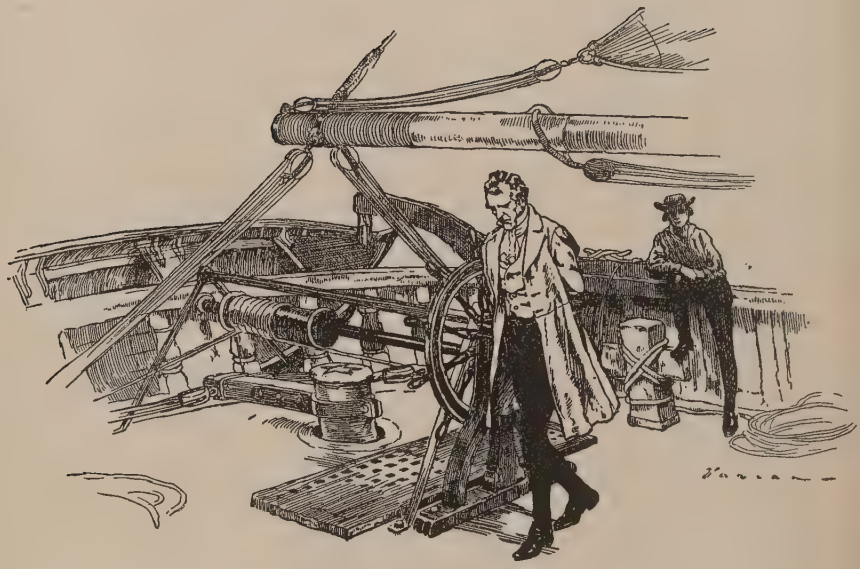
Twenty minutes afterward, to the amazement of every man on deck, he came stamping up again, red with anger, followed by Willie MacDougald, who was staggering under the weight of his bag. Ordering a boat launched, he turned to Uncle Seth, who had followed him and stood behind him with a blank, dismayed look.

"Mr. Upham," he said, "I am sorry to leave your vessel like this, but I will not, sir, I will not remain in command of any craft afloat, be she coasting brig or ship-of-the-line, where the owner's friends are suffered to treat me thus. Willie, drop my bag into the boat."

And with that, red-faced and breathing hard, he left the Adventure and gave angry orders to the men in the boat, who rowed him ashore. But it was not the last that we were to see of Gideon North.

III

A LOW LAND IN THE EAST



CHAPTER X

MATTERSON

"And who," I wondered, as I turned from watching Gideon North go out of sight between the buildings that lined the harbor side, "who will now command the Adventure?"

You would have expected the captain's departure to make a great stir in a vessel; yet scarcely a person forward knew what was going on, and aft only Seth Upham and Willie MacDougald, besides myself, were seeing him off. Uncle Seth still stood in the companionway with that blank, dazed expression; but Willie MacDougald scratched his head and looked now at me and now at Uncle Seth, as if whatever had happened below had frightened him mightily. The picture of their bewilderment was so funny that I could have burst out laughing; and yet, so obviously was there much behind it which did not appear on the surface, that I was really more apprehensive than amused.

When Uncle Seth suddenly turned and disappeared down the companionway, and when Willie MacDougald with an inquisitive glance at me darted over to the companion-hatch and stood there with his head cocked birdlike on one side to catch any sound that might issue from the cabin, I boldly followed my uncle.

The brig was riding almost without motion at her anchorage, and all on deck was so quiet that we could hear across the silent harbor the rattle of blocks in a distant ship, the voice of a bos'n driving his men to greater effort, and from the distant city innumerable street cries. In the cabin, too, as I descended to it, everything was very

still. When I came to the door, I saw my uncle standing at one side of the big, round table on which a chart lay. Opposite him sat Neil Gleazen, and on his right that huge man with the light voice, Molly Matterson.

None of them so much as glanced at me when I appeared in the door; but I saw at once that, although they were saying nothing, they were thinking deeply and angrily. The intensity with which they glared, the two now staring hard at Seth Upham and now at each other, my uncle looking first at Matterson, then at Gleazen, and then at Matterson again, so completely absorbed my interest, that I think nothing short of a broadside fired by a man-of-war could have distracted my attention.

I heard the steps creak as Willie MacDougald now came on tiptoe part way down the companion. I heard the heavy breathing of the men in the cabin. Then, far across the harbor, I heard the great voice of a chantey man singing while the crew heaved at the windlass. And still the three men glared in silence at one another. It was Matterson who broke the spell, when in his almost girlish voice he said; "He don't seem to like me as captain of his vessel, Neil."

"You old whited sepulchre," Neil Gleazen cried, speaking not to Matterson, but to my uncle; "just because you've got money at stake is no reason to think you know a sailor-man when you see one. Why, Matterson, here, could give Gideon North a king's cruiser and outsail him in a Gloucester pinkie."

My uncle swallowed hard and laughed a little wildly. "If you had n't got yourself run out of town, Neil Gleazen, and had to leave your chests with all that's in them behind you, you might have had money to put in this vessel yourself. As it is, the brig's mine and I swear I'll have a voice in saying who's to be her master."

"A voice you shall have," Gleazen retorted, while the bull-necked Matterson broadly grinned at the squabble; "a voice you shall have, but you're only one of five good men, Seth, only one, and a good long way from being the best of 'em, and your voice is just one vote in five. Now I, here, vote for Molly and, Molly, here, votes for himself, and there ain't no need of thinking who the others would vote for. We've outvoted you already."

Uncle Seth turned from red to white and from white to red. "Let it be one vote to four, then. Though it's only one to four, my vote is better than all the rest. The brig's mine. I swear, if you try to override me so, I'll put her in the hands of the law. And if these cursed Spaniards will not do me justice,—" again he laughed a little wildly,— "there's an American frigate in port and we'll see what her officers will say."

"Ah," said Gleazen, gently, "we'll see what we shall see. But you mark what I'm going to tell you, Seth Upham, mark it and mull it over: I'm a ruined man; there's a price on *my* head, I know. But they'll never take me, because I've friends ashore,— eh, Molly? You can do *me* no harm by going to the captain of any frigate you please. *But — But* — let me tell you this, Seth Upham: when you've called in help and got this brig away from your friends what have given you a chance to better yourself, news is going to come to the captain of that ship about all them churches you and me used to rob together when we was lads in Topham. Aye, Seth, and about one thing and another that will interest the captain. And supposing he don't clap you into irons and leave you there to cool your heels,—supposing he don't, mind you,— which he probably will, to get the reward that folks will be offering when I've told what I shall tell,— supposing you come back to Topham from which you run away with

that desperate villain, Neil Gleazen,— supposing, which ain't likely, that's what happens, you'll find when you get there that news has come before you. You old fool, unless you and me holds together like the old friends which we used to be, you'll find yourself a broken man with the jail doors open and waiting for you. I know what I know, and you know what I know, but as long as I keep my mouth shut nobody else is going to know. *As long as I keep my mouth shut, mind you.*

"Now I votes for Molly Matterson as captain; and let me tell you, Seth Upham, you'd better be reasonable and come along like you and me owned this brig together, which by rights we do, seeing that I've put in the brains as my share. It ain't fitting to talk of *your* owning her outright."

Uncle Seth, I could see, was baffled and bewildered and hurt. With an irresolute glance at me, which seemed to express his confusion plainer than words, he nervously twitched his fingers and at last in a low, hurried voice said: "That's all talk, and talk's cheap — unless it's money talking. Now if you had n't made a fool of yourself and had to run away and leave your chests and money behind you, you'd have a right to talk."

Gleazen suddenly threw back his head and roared with laughter.

"Them chests!" he bellowed. "Oh, them chests!"

"Well," Uncle Seth cried, wrinkling his face till his nose seemed to be the centre of a spider's web, "well, why not? What's so cursedly funny about them chests?"

"Oh, ho ho!" Gleazen roared. "Them chests! Money! There warn't no money in them chests — not a red round copper."

"But what — but why — " Uncle Seth's face, always quick to express every emotion, smoothed out until it was

as blank with amazement as before it had been wrinkled with petulance.

"You silly fool," Gleazen thundered,— no other word can express the vigor of contempt and derision that his voice conveyed,— "do you think that, if ever I had got a comfortable fortune safe to Topham, I'd take to the sea and leave it there? Bah! Them chests was crammed to the lid with toys and trinkets, which I've long since given to the children. Them chests served their purpose well, Seth,— " again he laughed, and we knew that he was laughing at my uncle and me, who had believed all his great tales of vast wealth,— "and they'll do me one more good turn when they show their empty sides to whomsoever pulls 'em open in hope of finding gold."

Matterson, looking from one to another, laughed with a ladylike tinkle of his light voice, and Gleazen once more guffawed; but my uncle sat weakly down and turned toward me his dazed face.

He and I suddenly, for the first time, realized to the full what we should of course have been stupid indeed not to have got inklings of before: that Neil Gleazen had come home to Topham, an all but penniless adventurer; that, instead of being a rich man who wished to help my uncle and the rest of us to better ourselves, he had been working on credulous Uncle Seth's cupidity to get from him the wherewithal to reëstablish his own shattered fortunes.

Of the pair of us, I was the less amazed. Although I had by no means guessed all that Gleazen now revealed, I had nevertheless been more suspicious than my uncle of the true state of the chests that Gleazen had so willingly abandoned at the inn.

"Come," said Matterson, lightly, "let's be friends, Upham. I'm no ogre. I can sail your vessel. You'll see the crew work as not many crews know how to work —

and yet I'll not drive 'em hard, either. I make one flogging go a long way, Upham. Here's my hand on it. Nor do I want to be greedy. Say the word and I'll be mate, not skipper. Find your own skipper."

My uncle looked from one to the other. He was still dazed and disconcerted. We lacked a mate because circumstances had forced us to sail at little more than a moment's notice, with only Mr. Severance as second officer. It was manifest that the two regarded my uncle with good-humored contempt, that he was not in the least necessary to their plans, yet that with something of the same clumsy tolerance with which a great, confident dog regards an annoying terrier, they were entirely willing to forgive his petulant outbursts, provided always that he did not too long persist in them. What could the poor man do? He accepted Matterson's proffered hand, failed to restrain a cry when the mighty fist squeezed his fingers until the bones crackled, and weakly settled back in his chair, while Gleazen again laughed.

When he and Gleazen faced about with hostile glances, I turned away, carrying with me the knowledge that Matterson was to go to Africa with the Adventure in one capacity, if not in another, and left the three in the cabin.

In the companionway I all but stumbled over Willie MacDougald, who was such a comical little fellow, with his great round eyes and freckled face and big ears, which stood out from his head like a pair of fans, that I was amused by what I assumed to be merely his lively curiosity. But late that same night I found occasion to suspect that it was more than mere curiosity, and of that I shall presently speak again.

There were, it seemed to me, when I came up on the quarter-deck of the Adventure, a thousand strange sights

to be seen, and in my eager desire to miss none of them I almost, *but never quite*, forgot what had been going on below.

When at last Seth Upham emerged alone from the companion head, he came and stood beside me without a word, and, like me, fell to watching the flags of many nations that were flying in the harbor, the city on its flat, low plain, the softly green hills opposite us, and the great fortifications that from the entrance to the harbor and from the distant hilltops guarded town and port. After a while, he began to pace back and forth across the quarter-deck. His head was bent forward as he walked and there was an unhappy look in his eyes.

I could see that various of the men were watching him; but he gave no sign of knowing it, and I truly think he was entirely unconscious of what went on around him. Back and forth he paced, and back and forth, buried always deep in thought; and though several times I became aware that he had fixed his eyes upon me, never was I able to look up quickly enough to meet them squarely, nor had he a word to say to me. Poor Uncle Seth! Had one who thought himself so shrewd really fallen such an easy victim to a man whose character he ought by rights to have known in every phase and trait? I left him still pacing the deck when I went below to supper.

Because of my long seasickness I had had comparatively few meals in the cabin, and always before there had been the honest face of Gideon North to serve me as a sea anchor, so to speak; but now even Uncle Seth was absent, and as Arnold Lamont and I sat opposite Matterson and Gleazen, with Uncle Seth's place standing empty at one end of the table and the captain's place standing empty at the other, I could think only of Gideon North going

angrily over the side, and of Uncle Seth pacing ceaselessly back and forth.

Willie MacDougald slipped from place to place, laying and removing dishes. Now he was replenishing the glasses, — Gleazen's with port from a cut-glass decanter, Matterson's with gin from a queer old blown-glass bottle with a tiny mouth,— now he was scurrying forward, pursued by a volley of oaths, to get a new pepper for the grinder. Gleazen, always an able man at his food, said little and ate much; but Matterson showed us that he could both eat and talk, for he consumed vast quantities of bread and meat, and all the while he discoursed so interestingly on one thing and another that, in spite of myself, I came fairly to hang upon his words.

As in his incongruously effeminate voice he talked of men in foreign ports, and strangely rigged ships, and all manner of hairbreadth escapes, and described desperate fights that had occurred, he said, not a hundred miles from where at that moment we sat, I could fairly see the things he spoke of and hear the guns boom. He thrilled me by tales of wild adventure on the African coast and both fascinated and horrified me by stories of "the trade," as he called it.

"Ah," he would say, so lightly that it was hard to believe that the words actually came from that great bulk of a man, "I have seen them marching the niggers down to the sea, single file through the jungle, chained one to another. Men, women and children, all marching along down to the barracoons, there's a sight for you! Chained hand and foot they are, too, and horribly afraid until they're stuffed with rice and meat, and see that naught but good's intended. They're cheery, then, aye, cheery's the word."

"Hm!" Gleazen grunted.

"Aye, it's a grand sight to see 'em clap their hands

and sing and gobble down the good stews and the rice. They're better off than ever they were before, and it don't take 'em long to learn that."

Matterson cast a sidelong glance at me as he leaned back and sipped his gin, and Gleazen grunted again. Gleazen, too, I perceived, was singularly interested in seeing how I took their talk.

What they were really driving at, I had no clear idea; but I soon saw that Arnold Lamont, more keenly than I, had detected the purpose of Matterson's stories.

"That," said he, slowly and precisely, "is very interesting. Has Mr. Gleazen likewise engaged in the slave trade?"

There was something in his voice that caused the two of them to exchange quick glances.

Gleazen looked hard at his wine glass and made no answer; but Matterson, with a genial smile, replied: "Oh, I said nothing of engaging in the slave trade. I was just telling of sights I've seen in Africa, and I've no doubt at all that Mr. Gleazen has seen the same sights, and merrier ones."

"It is a wonderful thing," Arnold went on, in a grave voice, "to travel and see the world and know strange peoples. I have often wished that I could do so. Now I think that my wish is to be gratified."

As before, there was something strangely suggestive in his voice. I puzzled over it and made nothing of it, yet I could no more ignore it than could Matterson and Gleazen, who again exchanged glances.

When Matterson muttered a word or two in Spanish and Gleazen replied in the same language, I looked hard at Arnold to see if he understood.

His expression gave no indication that he did, but I could not forget the words he had used long ago in Top-

ham before ever I had suspected Neil Gleazen of being a whit other than he seemed. "A man," Arnold had said, "does not tell all he knows." There was no doubt in my mind that Arnold was a *man* in every sense of the word.

Again Gleazen and Matterson spoke in Spanish; then Matterson with a warm smile turned to us and said, "Will you have a glass of wine, lads? You, Arnold? No? And you, Joe? No?" He raised his eyebrows and with a deprecatory gesture glanced once more at Gleazen.

I thought of Uncle Seth still pacing the quarter-deck. I suddenly realized that I was afraid of the two men who sat opposite me — afraid to drink with them or even to continue to talk with them. My fear passed as a mood changes; but in its place came the determination that I would not drink with them or talk with them. They were no friends of mine. I pushed back my chair, and, leaving Arnold below, went on deck.

CHAPTER XI

NEW LIGHT ON AN OLD FRIEND

My uncle was still pacing back and forth when I came out into the sunset; then, almost at once, the twilight had come and gone, and I saw him as a deeper shadow moving up and down the deck, with only the faint sound of his feet to convince me that my eyes saw truly. The very monotony of his slow, even steps told me that there was no companionship to be got from him, and at that moment more than anything else I desired companionship.

What I then did was for me a new step. Leaving the quarter-deck, I went forward to the steerage and found Sim Muzzy smoking his pipe with the sailmaker.

"So it's you," he querulously said, when he recognized me. "Now are n't you sorry you ever left Topham? If I had lost as much as you have by Seth Upham's going into his second childhood, I vow I'd jump overboard and be done with life. You're slow enough to look up your old friends, seems to me."

"But," said I, impatiently, "I've been like to die of seasickness. I could n't look you up then, and you never came near me."

"Oh, that's all very well for you to say, but you know I could n't come aft without a trouncing from that Neil Gleazen — I'm sure I'd like to see something awful happen to him to pay him for breaking up the store! — and you've had plenty of time since. If I did n't show more fondness for my friends than you do, I'd at least have the good grace to stay away from them. You've used me very

shabbily indeed, Joe Woods, and I've got the spirit to resent it."

The sailmaker, meanwhile, as if he were not listening with vast interest to all that Sim had to say against me, looked absently away and quietly smoked his pipe. But I imagined that I detected in his eyes a glint of amusement at what he assumed to be my discomfiture, and angered as much by that as by Sim's petulance, I turned my back on the two and went on forward to the forecastle, where I found Abraham Guptil, sprawled full length, in quiet conversation with two shipmates.

From Abe I got pleasanter greetings.

"Here's Joe Woods," he cried, "one of the best friends Abe Guptil ever had. You had a hard voyage, did n't you, Joe? I was sorry to hear you were so bad off. I'd hoped to see more of you."

I threw myself down beside Abe and fell to talking with him and the others about affairs aft and forward, such as Captain North and his quarrel with Seth Upham, and the meeting of Gleazen and Matterson, and Sim Muzzy and his irritating garrulousness, and a score of things that had happened among the crew. It was all so very friendly and pleasant, that I was sorry to leave them and go back to my stateroom, and I did so only when I was like to have fallen asleep in spite of myself. But on the quarter-deck, when I passed, I saw Seth Upham still pacing back and forth. He must have known that it was I, for I came close to him and spoke his name, yet he completely ignored my presence.

How long he kept it up, I do not know; looking over my shoulder, I saw last, as I went down the companionway, his stooped figure and bowed head moving like a shadow back and forth, and back and forth. Nor do I know just when my drowsy thoughts merged into dreams; but it seems to me, as I look back upon that night, that my

uncle's bent figure silently pacing the deck haunted me until dawn. Only when some noise waked me at daybreak, and I crept up the companionway and found that he was no longer there, did I succeed in escaping from the spell.

Returning to our stateroom to dress, I came upon Arnold Lamont lying wide awake.

"Joe," said he, when I was pulling on my clothes, "I am surprised to hear that Seth Upham ever believed Neil Gleazen to be aught but penniless."

I turned and looked at him. How could Arnold have learned of the quarrel between Uncle Seth and Gleazen and Matterson, which only I had witnessed? Or, if he had not learned of the quarrel and what transpired in the course of it, where had he heard the story of Gleazen's empty chests?

Perceiving my amazement, he smiled. "I know many things that happen on board this vessel, Joe," he said.

"How much," I demanded, "do you know about what happened yesterday?"

"Everything," said he.

"But how?" I cried. I was at my wit's end with curiosity.

"Listen!"

I heard a quick step.

"Joe," he whispered, "you must never tell. Crawl under your blankets and cover your head so no one can see that you are there."

More puzzled, even, than before, I complied. Whatever Arnold had up his sleeve, I was convinced that he was not merely making game of me; and, in truth, I had no sooner concealed myself in my tumbled berth, which was so deep that this was not hard to do, than a gentle tap sounded on the door.

"Come in," Arnold said in a low voice.

The door then opened and I heard hesitant steps.

"Well?" Arnold said, when I had heard the latch of the door click shut again.

"If you please, sir," said a piping little voice, which I knew could come from only Willie MacDougald, "if you please, sir, they were laughing hearty at Mr. Upham most of the morning."

"Yes?"

"Yes, sir, and they said it was a shame for him to ruin his complexion by a-walking all night."

"What else?"

"Yes, sir, and he was asleep all morning — at least, sir, he was in his berth, but I heard him groaning, sir."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, sir. They did n't seem to like the way you and Joe Woods acted about their stories of trading niggers, and they said — "

"Ha!" That Arnold rose suddenly, I knew by the creaking of his bunk.

"And they said, sir — " Willie's voice fell as if he were afraid to go on.

"Yes?"

"And they said — "

"Yes, yes! Come, speak out."

"And they said — " again Willie hesitated, then he continued with a rush, but in a mere whisper — "that they was going to get rid of you two."

For a long time there was silence, then Arnold asked in the same low voice, "Have they laid their plans?"

"They was talking of one thing and another, sir, but in such a way that I could n't hear."

Again a long silence followed, which Willie MacDougald broke by saying, "Please, sir, it was to-day you was to pay me."

"Ah, yes."

I heard a clinking sound as if money were changing hands; then Willie MacDougald said, "Thank you, sir," and turned the latch.

As he left the stateroom I could not forbear from sticking my head out of the blankets to look after him. He was so small, so young, seemingly so innocent! Yet for all his innocence and high voice and respectful phrases, he had revealed a devilish spirit of hard bargaining by the tone and manner, if not the words, with which he demanded his pay; and I was confounded when, as I looked after him, he turned, met my eyes, and instead of being disconcerted, gave me a bold, impudent grimace.

"He is a little devil," Arnold said with a smile.

"Do you believe what he tells you?"

"Yes, he does not dare lie to me."

"But," said I, "what of his story that they intend to get rid of us?"

Arnold smiled again. "I shall put it to good use."

It was evident enough now where Arnold had learned of the quarrel; and as I noted anew his level, fearless gaze, his clear eyes, and his erect, commanding carriage, I again recalled his words,— who could forget them? — "A man does not tell all he knows." More and more I was coming to realize how little we of Topham had known the manner of man that this Frenchman truly was.

It was with a paradoxical sense of security, a new confidence in my old friend, that I accompanied Arnold to breakfast in the great cabin, where two vacant places and three plates still laid showed that Gleazen and Matterson had long since come and gone, and that Seth Upham was still keeping aloof in his own quarters. But little Willie MacDougald, appearing as ever a picture of childish innocence, assiduously waited on us; and before we were

through, Matterson came below, flung his great body into a chair and, calling for gin, settled himself for a friendly chat.

"Yes, lads," he said in his oddly light voice, "I've decided to cast my lot with you. I'm going to ship as mate. Not that I feel I ought, — I really scarce can afford the time for a voyage now,— but Neil Gleazen and Seth Upham would n't hear to my not going."

He broadly grinned at me, for he knew well that I had heard every word that passed between the three the day before.

"Well, lads," he went on, "it's a great country we're going to, and there's great adventures ahead. Yes,— " he spoke now with a sort of humorous significance, as if he were playing boldly with an idea and enjoying it simply because he was confident that we could not detect what lay behind it,— "Yes, there's great adventures ahead. It's queer, but even here in Cuba a young man never knows what's going to overtake him next. I've seen young fellows, with their plans all laid, switched sudden to quite another set of plans that no one, no, sir, not no one ever thought they'd tumble into. It's mysterious. Yes, sir, mysterious it is."

That there was a double meaning behind all this talk, I had no doubt whatever, and it irritated me that he should tease us as if we were little children; but I could make no particular sense of what he said, except so far as Willie MacDougald's tale served to indicate that it was a threat; and Arnold Lamont, apparently not a whit disturbed, continued his meal with great composure and, whatever he may have thought, gave no sign to enlighten me.

We had so little to say to Matterson in reply, that he soon left us, and for another day we sat idle on deck or amused ourselves as best we could. The crew had num-

berless duties to perform, such as painting and caulking and working on the rigging. Arnold Lamont and Sim Muzzy got out the chessmen and played for hours, while Matterson watched them with an interest so intent that I suspected him of being himself a chess-player; and Gleazen and Uncle Seth intermittently played at cards. So the day passed, until in the early evening a boat hailed us, and a sailor came aboard and said that Captain Jones of the Merry Jack and Eleanor sent his compliments to Mr. Upham and Mr. Gleazen and would be glad to have all the gentlemen come visiting and share a bowl of punch, at making which his steward had an excellent hand.

My uncle seized upon the invitation with alacrity, for it seemed that he had met Captain Jones in Havana two days since. He called to Gleazen and Matterson, saying with something of his old sharp, pompous manner that they certainly must come, too, and that he was going also to bring Arnold, Sim, and me, at which, I perceived, the two exchanged smiles.

Sim came running aft, ready to complain at the slightest provocation, but too pleased with the prospect of an outing to burst forth on no grounds at all; Neil Gleazen and my uncle led the way toward the quarter-boat in which we were to go; and Arnold followed them.

It did not escape me that both Gleazen and Matterson had held their tongues since the sailor delivered his master's invitation, and that, as they passed me, they exchanged nudges. I was all but tempted into staying on board the Adventure. As I meditated on Willie MacDougald's story, and Matterson's allusions,— how significant they were, I could not know,— the silence of the two alarmed me more than direct threats would have done. Why should Gleazen and Matterson look at each other and smile when all the rest — all, that is, except myself —

were going down by the chains ahead of them? Would they not, unless they had known more than we about this Captain Jones and his ship, the Merry Jack and Eleanor, have asked questions, or perhaps even have declined to go?

Whatever my thoughts, I had no chance to express them; so over the side I went, close after the rest, and down into the boat where the sailors waited at their oars. To none of us did it occur that it was in any way contrary to the usual etiquette to take Sim Muzzy with us. Except that force of circumstances had placed him in the steerage, his position aboard the Adventure was the same as Arnold's and mine, or even Gleazen's, for that matter.

Poor Sim! For once he forgot to complain and came with us as gayly as the fly that walked into the spider's parlor. And yet I now hold the opinion,— I was a long, long time in coming to it,— that after all fate was very kind to Simeon Muzzy.

He settled himself importantly in the boat and began to talk a blue streak, as the saying is, about one thing and another, until I would almost have tossed him overboard. Uncle Seth, too, frowned at him, and the strange sailors smiled, and Gleazen and Matterson spoke together in Spanish and laughed as if they shared a lively joke. But Arnold Lamont leaned back and half closed his eyes and appeared to hear nothing of what was going on.

All the way to the Merry Jack and Eleanor, which lay about a quarter of a mile from the Adventure, Gleazen and Matterson continued at intervals to exchange remarks in Spanish; and although Uncle Seth and Arnold Lamont completely ignored them, Sim, who by now had got so used to foreign tongues that they no longer astonished and confused him, took it hard that he could make nothing of what they said and went into a lively tantrum about it, at which the strange sailors chuckled as they rowed.

Passing under the counter of the vessel, we continued to the gangway; but just as we came about the stern, Arnold touched my hand and by a motion so slight as to pass almost unnoticed drew my attention to a man-of-war that lay perhaps a cable's length away.

Under cover of the loud exchange of greetings and the bustle that occurred when the others were going aboard, he whispered, "We are safe for the time being. See! Yonder is a frigate. But either you or I must stay on deck, and if there is aught of an outcry below, he must call for help in such a way that there shall be no doubt of its coming."

"What do you mean?" I whispered.

"Hush! They are watching us."

As we followed the others, Arnold stopped by the bulwark and half leaned, half fell, against it.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," he said in that slow, precise voice, "For the moment I am ill. It is a mere attack of dizziness, but I dare not go below. I must stay in the open air. I beg you will pardon me. I intend no rudeness."

His face did look pale in the half-light, and the others, whatever their suspicions may have been, said nothing to indicate that they doubted him. When Captain Jones of the Merry Jack and Eleanor came toward us a second time and again with oily courtesy asked us all to the cabin, Gleazen and Matterson made excuses for Arnold, and the rest of us went down into the gloomy space below and left him in the gangway whence he could watch the hills, which were now dark against the evening sky, and the black masts of the frigate, which stood by like sentries guarding our lives and fortunes.

There was a fetid, sickening odor about the ship, such as I had never before experienced, and the cabin reeked of rum and tobacco. The skipper had the face of a human brute, and the mate's right hand was twisted all out of

shape, as if some heavy weapon had once smashed the bones of it. The more I looked about the dark, low cabin, and the more I saw and heard of the skipper and his mate, the more I wished I were on deck with Arnold. But the punch was brewed in a colossal bowl and gave forth a fragrance of spices, and Sim Muzzy drank with the rest, and for a while the five of them were as jolly as the name of the ship would indicate.

CHAPTER XII

CAPTAIN NORTH AGAIN

First there was talk of old times, for it seemed that Matterson and Gleazen and Captain Jones were friends of long standing. Then there was talk of strange wars and battles, particularly of one battle of Insamankow, of which neither Gleazen nor Matterson had had other news than that which Captain Jones now gave them, and in which it seemed that the British had met with great disaster, although it puzzled me to know wherein such a battle even remotely concerned any of us. After that there was talk of various other things — a murderous plague of smallpox that years before had swept the African coast, a war between the Fantis and Ashantis, a cruiser that they, with oaths and laughter, said had struck her flag in battle with a slaver, a year's journey with desert caravans that traded with the Arabs, and last of all, and apparently most important, curious ways of circumventing the laws of England and America and of bribing Cuban officers of low degree and high.

All this, in a stuffy little place where the mingled smells of rum and spices and tobacco hung heavily on the air as they grew stale, filled me with disgust and almost with nausea. Vile oaths slipped out between each two sentences, if by rare chance they were not woven into the very warp of the sentences themselves; such stories of barbarous and unbelievable cruelty were told and retold as I cannot bear to call to mind, to say nothing of repeating; and always I was aware of that sickening odor, now strong, now weak, which I had detected before we went below.

The first sign that the others gave of noticing it was when Gleazen threw back his head and cried, "Pfaw! What a stench! The smell is all I have against the trade."

Matterson laughed, and Captain Jones with his grand manner said, "You have been too long away from it, Mr. Gleazen."

"Too long? That's as may be. An old horse settles easy into harness again."

Captain Jones smiled. With apparent irrelevance, but with a reminiscent air, he said; "Too long or no, it's a long time since first we met,— a long, long time, and yet I remember as yesterday what a night we had of it. It began when that blasted Frenchman slipped his cables and sought to beat us up the river. It was you, Gleazen, that saved us then. When your message came, with what haste we landed the boats and towed the old brig straight up stream! Row? We rowed like the devil, and though our palms peeled, we won the race. It was a good cargo you had waiting, too. Only seven died in the passage."

In the passage! Already I had suspected, now I knew, that the ship with her fast lines and cruel officers was none other than a slaver; that the smell was the stench of a slave-ship; that in that very cabin men had bartered for human beings. If I could, I would have turned my back on them there and then; the repugnance that I had long felt grew into downright loathing. What would I not have given to be up and away with Arnold Lamont! But I was a mere stripling, alone, so far as help was concerned, in a den of villains crueler than wolves. Though I would eagerly have left them, I dared not; and almost at once something happened that in any case would have held me where I was.

Gleazen leaned across the punch-bowl and said to Captain Jones; "Who is there in port will make a good captain

for a smart brig with a neat bow, swift to sail and clever to work?"

Captain Jones ran his fingers through his stiff, shaggy hair. "Now, let me see," he replied, "there's a man — "

Cutting him sharply off, my uncle spoke up, "Gentlemen, I will choose the master of my own vessel."

I knew by his voice that he, as well as I, was sickened by the situation in which we found ourselves. Poor Uncle Seth, I thought, how little did he suspect, when he united his fortune with the golden dreams of Neil Gleazen, that he was to travel such a road as this!

"Ah!" said Gleazen. "And who will it be?" An unkind smile played around his mouth.

"Gideon North, if he will come back to us," said my uncle.

"Ah!" Matterson, Gleazen, and Captain Jones exclaimed as if with one breath.

For a minute or so the three sat in silence, looking hard at the top of the table; then Matterson with a queer twist of his lips spoke in Spanish. When, after another silence, the captain of the Merry Jack and Eleanor answered at length in the same tongue, Matterson responded briefly, and all three men nodded.

A quality so curiously and subtly dramatic pervaded the scene that I remember thinking, as I looked about, what a rare theme it would have made for a painter. I believe that a skillful artist, if he had studied the faces of us all as we sat there, could have put our characters on his canvas so faithfully that he would have been in danger of paying for his honesty with his life, had Matterson or the strange captain had a chance at him in the dark. The very place in which we sat smelled of villainies, and the rat-like captain of the ship was a fit master of such a den.

Gleazen now turned to my uncle. "Very well," said he,

with an amused smile, "Joe, here, and Arnold Lamont are in good odor with him. Suppose, then, that we let them go ashore and hunt him out and talk matters over. I've no doubt he'll come back. He went off in a tantrum, as a man will when he takes pepper up his nose. You must know where the fellow's staying. You were to send him the money due him. Captain Jones will lend them one of his boats for now, and I'll have our boat ready to take them all off together in, say, three hours' time."

As I have said in an earlier chapter of this narrative, by inclination I was a dreamer; and yet I must have been more than a mere dreamer, and worse, not to have scented by those dark looks and cryptic words some trouble or other afoot. It was as if for a long time I had seen the three to be united definitely against us, but as if I now for the first time perceived what a desperately black and sinful alliance they made — it was as if the spectacle struck me into a daze. When Gleazen finished, the other two again nodded, and in the very manner of their nods there was something as cold and deliberate as a snake's eye. Had I been able to rely upon the impressions of the moment, I should have said that time stood as still as the sun upon Gibeon; that for many minutes we stared at one another in mutual suspicion; that the beating of my heart had all but ceased. But the impressions of the moment deceived me.

When Gleazen stopped speaking, he hit with his elbow the ink-bottle that stood on the table. It tipped on its side, rolled deliberately across the table, and fell; but before it struck the floor, Matterson, leaning out with a swift, dexterous motion, caught it, tried the stopper, and murmured as if to himself, "There's luck for you! Not a drop is lost." In the time it had taken that bottle to roll across the table, and not a second more, I had suffered that untold suspense.

Now the spell was shattered, and hearing someone speaking in an undertone behind me, I turned and caught Captain Jones in the act of giving instructions *in Spanish* to his negro steward.

I was surprised and angry. Though of late I had heard much Spanish, it seemed to me that to speak it under the circumstances was so rude as to verge on open affront. Then Uncle Seth, gulping down his astonishment that Gleazen should so readily accede to his wishes, spoke up for himself; and because I was so deeply interested in whatever he might have to say, I turned my back on the mungo, ceased to watch Captain Jones, and did not notice that the steward went immediately on deck. Nor did I attribute any significance to the sound of oars bumping against the pins, which I soon afterwards heard. Had not Arnold Lamont been waiting on deck with his eyes fixed apparently on the dark outline of the frigate, my stupidity must have cost us even more than it did.

"Very well," said Uncle Seth. "I will do as you suggest."

"Perhaps," said Gleazen, thoughtfully, "Sim Muzzy, here, would like to go."

"Oh, yes," cried Sim, "I'm fair dying for a trip on dry land. Yes, indeed, I'd like to go. I'd like it mightily. You've always said, Mr. Gleazen, I was too thick to do harm. Oh, yes indeed!"

Matterson smiled and Captain Jones covered his mouth with his hand, but Gleazen gravely nodded.

"Well, Sim, go you shall," said he. "There ain't one of us here but is glad to see an honest man take his fling ashore, and Havana's a city for you. Such handsome women as ride about in their carriages! And such sights as you'll see in the streets! You'll be a wiser man e'er you come back to us, Sim. I swear, I'd like to go myself,— but not to-night! I ain't one to neglect business for pleasure."

When he shot a glance at Matterson and Captain Jones, my eyes followed his, and I saw that once more they had fixed their gaze on the top of the table. Now I was actually unable, so baffling had been their change of front, to make up my mind whether they were to be suspected or to be trusted.

"Well," said Gleazen, "we are all agreed. Lay down your orders, Seth. They'll carry them out to the last letter."

So Uncle Seth told me where to find Gideon North, and Neil Gleazen wrote it on a paper,— *in Spanish*, mind you! — and they put their heads together, every one, to think up such arguments as would induce Captain North to return, all with an appearance of enthusiasm that amazed me and might easily have put my suspicions to shame but for those other things that had happened.

"I'll be civil to him," Gleazen cried. "And you can tell him, too, that this is an *honest voyage*. We're to run no race with the king's cruisers, Joe."

"Aye," Captain Jones put in, "an able vessel and an honest voyage."

"With a mountain of treasure to be got," added Matterson.

The three spoke so gravely and straightforwardly now, that I wondered at their insolence; and as Sim and I got up to go, not yet quite believing that in reality, and not in a dream, we were being dispatched into the heart of that strange city, they accompanied us on deck and told Arnold Lamont that he was to go with us on our errand, and saw us safely started in the long boat of the Merry Jack and Eleanor before returning to their punch.

I could see that Arnold had no liking for the mission, but while we were in the boat he gave me no explanation of his uneasiness. Indeed, Sim Muzzy talked so much and

so fast that, when he once got started, you could scarcely have thrust the point of a needle into his monologue.

"She's a slaver," he murmured as we pulled away from the Merry Jack and Eleanor. "A cruel-hearted slaver! Thank heaven, we're never to have a hand in any such iniquity as that."

We looked back at the ship, black and gloomy against the sky, with many men moving about on her deck.

"You're a silly fool," one of the oarsmen cried, having overheard him, "a man without stomach, heart, or good red blood."

"Stomach, is it?" Sim retorted. "I'll have you know I eat my three hearty meals a day and they set well too. I can eat as much victuals as the next man. Why — " And there was no stopping him till the boat bumped against a wharf and we three stepped out.

The boat, I noticed, instead of putting back to the ship, waited by the wharf.

I turned and looked at the restless harbor, on which each light was reflected as a long, tremulous finger of flame that reached almost to my feet, at the sky, in which the stars were now shining, and at the anchored ships, each with her own story, could one but have read it; then I yielded to Sim's importunate call and in the darkness turned after him and Arnold. What reason was there to suspect that Simeon Muzzy and I stood at a crossroads where our paths divided?

Coming to the street, we stopped, and in the light from an open window put our heads together over the paper that Gleazen had written out and given to us with instructions to show it to the first person we met and turn where he pointed.

"Why, it's all in foreigner's talk!" Sim exclaimed.

"Let me see it," said Arnold.

He looked at it a long time and smiled. "I wonder," he said, "do they think we are so very simple?"

Now a man came toward us. Before he could pass, Arnold stepped suddenly forward and *addressed him in Spanish.*

"Why," cried I, when the passerby had gone, "you, too — do you talk Spanish?"

Arnold turned to me with a smile and said, for the second time, "A man does not tell all he knows."

Thrusting the paper into his pocket, he continued, "According to the directions that Mr. Gleazen has written down for our guidance, my friends, we should turn to the right. But according to my personal knowledge, which that man confirmed, we shall find Gideon North by turning to the left."

To the left, then, we turned; and only Arnold Lamont, who told me of it afterward, saw one of the boatmen, when we had definitely taken our course, leave the boat and run into the darkness in the direction that Neil Gleazen wished to send us.

Carriages passed us, and men on horseback, and negroes loitering along the streets. There were bright lights in the windows; and we saw ladies and their escorts riding in queer two-wheeled vehicles that I later learned were called *volantes.*

All was strange and bizarre and extraordinarily interesting. Never did three men from a little country village in New England find themselves in a more utterly foreign city. But although Sim and I had our eyes open for every new sight, I was nevertheless aware that Arnold was more alert than either of us, and twice he urged us to keep our eyes and wits about us.

Seeing nothing to fear, I inclined to smile at him. I now assumed that I was the bolder and more sophisticated of

the two of us. As we tramped along in the darkness, I got over the sense of unreality and felt as much at home in that alien city as if I had been back in the familiar streets and lanes of Boston.

Three times Arnold stopped to inquire the way; and the last time the man of whom he asked directions pointed at a house not a hundred yards distant and said, with a bow, "It is there, señor."

That he spoke in English, which he had heard Sim and me use, so surprised us that for the moment we were off our guard. I was vaguely aware of hearing many feet trampling along, and afterwards I realized that I had absently noticed the rumble of voices; but the city was all so strange that I thought nothing of either the feet or the voices, and gave all my attention to the stranger. He was turning away, bowing and protesting his pleasure in serving us, when Sim Muzzy said in a wondering tone, "Why, Arnold,— Joe,— how many people there are hereabouts! Look there!"

Arnold, turning as the poor fellow spoke, seized my arm. "*Mon dieu!*" he gasped, startled into his native French. Then in English he cried, "Quick, Joe! Quick! *Vite!* Ha! Strike out, Sim, strike!"

Around us there were indeed many men. They were approaching us from ahead and behind. Suddenly, fiercely, three or four of them rushed at us.

From his belt Arnold drew a knife and thrust at a man who had caught my collar. I lost no time in leaping free.

Two of them, now, were upon Arnold, crying out in Spanish; but he eluded them by a quick turn.

I first saw him spring out of their reach, then an arm, flung round my throat, cut my wind. As I throttled, I saw Arnold come charging back again, knife in hand. The blade slashed past my ear so closely that it cut the skin;

something spurted over my neck and the back of my head, and the arm that held me fell.

Arnold, his hand on my shoulder, dragged me free. Stooping, he picked up a stone and hurled it into the midst of our assailants, eliciting a screech of pain and anger. When I bent to follow his example, I saw a chance light flash on his knife-blade. But where, I thought, is Sim? Then, somewhere in the crowd, I heard him choking and gagging. My first impulse was to rush to his rescue, but instantly I saw the folly of such a course, so greatly were we outnumbered. For a moment Arnold and I held them off. Just behind us was a street corner. As we darted toward it, one man dashed out from the crowd, the rest followed, and a second time, with hoarse shouts, they charged down upon us. They came in a solid phalanx, but we rounded the corner and fled. At top speed we raced down the street and round a second corner. Distancing them for the moment, but with their yells ringing in our ears, we scrambled up over a wrought-iron gate that gave us hold for fingers and feet, through a garden rich with palms and statuary, over another gate and across still another street. There we scaled one gate more, and throwing ourselves down in some dense vines, lay quietly and got back our breath, while our eluded pursuers raced and called on the street outside.

The last thing I had heard as we ran was poor Sim Muzzy screaming for help.

"Who — wh-wh-o — wh-what — were th-they?" I gasped out.

"I believe it to have been a press-gang," Arnold replied. He, too, was gasping for breath, but he better controlled his voice.

After a time he added, "Poor Sim! I fear that he is now on his way into the service of the royal navy of Spain."

"But," I returned, "they cannot hold an American citizen."

"Lawfully," said he, "they cannot."

"Then we'll soon have Sim out again."

To this, he did not reply. He said merely, "You and I, Joe, must keep it a secret between us that I speak their language."

We lay a long time in the garden, with the stars shining above us and yellow lights streaming out of the house, and I thought of how skillfully Arnold Lamont had concealed his interest in what Gleazen and Matterson had said in a language they thought none of us could understand. But when the racing and shouting had gone, and come, and gone again, and when we both were convinced that all danger was past, we rose and stretched ourselves and went up to the house and knocked.

As the door swung open, a flood of light poured out into the garden; but we saw only an old negro, who stood like a black shadow in our way and assailed us with a broadside of angry Spanish. His gray head shook with fury, I suppose at finding us in the garden, and he spread his arms to keep us from entering the house. Behind him arose a hubbub, and an angry white man came rushing out. When to his fierce questions Arnold shot back prompt answers, his anger died, and tolerance took its place, and finally a wave of cordiality swept over his face. Stepping back he actually flung the door wide open and with stately bows ushered us into the high-studded hall. Then the negro went bustling down the passage and spoke in a low voice, and I was amazed beyond measure to see Gideon North himself step out of a lighted room.

In our flight Arnold, shrewd, quick to think and to act, had led us to the garden in the rear of the very house of which we had come in search.

"Well," said Captain North, when, after warm greetings and quick explanations, we were seated together behind closed doors, "of all that rascally crew in the cabin of the Adventure, you two are the only ones I should be glad to see again. How in the name of Beelzebub, prince of devils, did you light upon my lodging-house, and what has brought you here?"

Now Gleazen had suggested various arguments by which to bring Captain North back to his command, and not the least of them was an apology of a kind from himself; but they had all lacked sincerity, and as I knew well enough that Gleazen really would be very sorry if we should succeed in our errand, I had wisely determined to have none of them. It is exceedingly doubtful, however, if I should have dared to speak quite as plainly as did Arnold Lamont.

"Sir," he said, "we have come on a strange errand. We ask you to return to a ship where you have suffered indignities, to resume a command that you have resigned under just provocation, to help a man who, I fear, has forfeited every right to call upon you for help."

"I'm no hand for riddles," said Gideon North. "Talk plain sea-talk."

"Sir," said Arnold, "I ask you to come back as captain of the Adventure, to save Seth Upham from his — friends." Arnold smiled slightly.

"Blast Upham and his friends!"

"As you will. But that pair of leeches will get the blood from his heart, and Joe Woods, his heir, will lose every penny of his inheritance."

"Upham should have thought of that before. Leave him alone. He lies in the bed he made."

"He, poor man, does not think of it now. Indeed, I fear he's beyond saving."

Gideon North got up and went to the barred windows that opened upon the street.

"What is this wild-goose chase?" he suddenly demanded.

"Exactly what the object is I do not know," Arnold replied. "They talk of a treasure, but they are fit to rule an empire of liars. They are not, I believe, equipped for the slave trade, though of that you are a better judge than I."

Still Gideon North stood by the window. Without turning his head, he remarked, "I wonder why *they* want me back."

"They?" At that Arnold laughed. "*They* do not want you. Not they! Seth Upham insisted against their every wish. We came to your door with a press-gang at our heels. *They* planned that Joe and I should share Sim Muzzy's fate and never see you again — or them."

Thereupon Captain North turned about.

"I am interested," he said. "Aye, and tempted."

He stood for a while musing on all he had heard; then he smiled in a way that gave me confidence.

"We are three honest men with one purpose," he said; "but Gleazen and Matterson are a pair of double-dyed villains. I go into this affair knowing that it is at the risk of my life, but so help me! I'll take the plunge."

After a pause he added, "You spend the night with me, lads, and we will go on board together in the morning. That alone will give 'em a pretty start, for I've no doubt they think already that they're well rid of the three of us, and by sun-up they'll be sure of it. What's more, we'll go armed, lads, knives in our belts and pistols in our boots."

CHAPTER XIII

ISSUES SHARPLY DRAWN

We breakfasted next morning with Gideon North, and discussed in particular Gleazen and Matterson and in general affairs on board the Adventure. It seemed ages ago that I had first seen Gleazen on the porch of the old tavern in Topham. I told all I knew of how he had come to town and had won the confidence of so many people, of how the blacksmith alone had stood out against him, and of how that last wild night had justified the blacksmith in every word that he had uttered.

Then Arnold Lamont took up the story and told of scores of things that I had not perceived: little incidents that his keen eyes had detected, such as secret greetings passed between Gleazen and men with whom he pretended to have nothing whatever to do; chance phrases that I, too, had overheard, but that only Arnold's native shrewdness had translated aright; until I blushed with shame to think how great had been my own vanity and conceit — I who thought I had known so much, but really had known so little!

Then Captain North in blunt language told of things that had happened on board the Adventure, which made Uncle Seth out to be a poor, helpless dupe, and ended by saying vigorously, "Seth Upham is truly in a bad way, what with Gleazen and Matterson; and brave lads though you are, you're not their kind. Unless you two were smarter than human, they'd get you in the end, for they're cruel men, with no regard for human life, and the odds are all in their favor; but three of us in the cabin is quite an-

other matter. We'll see what we can do to turn the cat in the pan.

"And now," — he pushed his dishes away and set his elbows on the table,— "now for facts to work upon. The pair of them are going to Africa with a purpose. Am I not right?"

The question required no answer, but Arnold and I both nodded.

"A cargo's all well and good, and they've no objection to turning an honest dollar, just because it's honest; but there's more than honest dollars in this kettle of fish."

Again we nodded.

"Now, then, my lads, let me tell you this: when they've got what they want in Africa, whatever it may be, when they've squeezed Seth Upham's last dollar out of his wallet, when they no longer need honest men on board to protect them from cruising men-o'-war, then, lads, they're going to throw you and me to the sharks. As yet, it is too soon to strike against them. The odds are in their favor still, and as far as we're concerned there's no hope in Seth Upham, for they've got him twirling on a spit. It is for us, lads, to go through with them to the very end, to walk up and shake hands with death and the devil if worst comes to worst, but to be ready always to strike when the iron's hot, — aye, to strike till the sparks fly white."

So there we sealed our compact, Arnold Lamont and Gideon North and I, with no vows and with scant assertions, but with a completeness of understanding and accord that gave us, every one, unquestioning confidence in each of our associates. The fate of poor Sim Muzzy, which Arnold and I had so narrowly escaped, was still perilously close at hand; and in returning to the brig, which Gideon North had left in anger, we shared a common danger that

bound our alliance more firmly than any pledge would have bound it.

Our breakfast eaten, we sorted over some pistols that Captain North had ordered sent from a shop, and chose, each of us, a pair, for which our host insisted on standing scot; then he paid the bill for his lodgings, and, armed against whatever the future might bring, and firmly resolved that Gleazen and Matterson should not beat us in a matter of wits, we went into the street.

The day was beautiful almost beyond belief, and the streets of Havana were full of wonderful sights; but with the memory of poor Sim's sad fate in mind, and with our hearts set on the long contest that we must wage, we saw little of what went on around us. Followed by two negroes, who between them carried Captain North's bag, we boldly marched three abreast down through the city to the harbor-side, where we hailed a boatman and hired him to take us out to the brig.

Coming up to the gangway, Captain North loudly called, "Ahoy there!"

There was a rush to the side of the brig, and a dozen faces looked down at us; but none of them were the faces that we most desired to see.

"Ho!" Captain North exclaimed, "they're not here. You there, pass a line, and step lively. Two of you bear a hand to lift this bag on board."

At that moment we heard steps, and a newcomer appeared at the rail. It was Cornelius Gleazen. As he stared at us without a word, he appeared to be the most surprised man that ever I had seen.

"Good-morning, Mr. Gleazen," Captain North called. "I've got your messages and thank you kindly. I reciprocate all good wishes and I'm sure when anyone comes out with a handsome apology, I'm no man to bear a

grudge. I resume command with no hard feelings. Good-morning, sir."

By that time he was on deck and advancing aft.

I had already seen Cornelius Gleazen in some extraordinary situations, and later I was to see him in certain situations beside which the others paled to milk and water, but never at any other time, from the moment when I first saw him on the porch at the tavern until the day when we parted not to meet again this side of Judgment, did I see Cornelius Gleazen affected in just the way that he was affected then.

He backed away from Captain North, replied loudly as if in greeting, still backed away, and finally turned and went below, where evidently he recovered his powers of speech, for up came my uncle with Matterson at his heels.

"Captain North," Uncle Seth cried, meeting him with right hand outstretched, "I declare I'm glad you're back again, and I'm sure that all will go well from this time on."

There was real pathos in Uncle Seth's eagerness to secure the friendship of the stout captain. In his straightforward, confiding manner there was no suggestion of his old sharpness and pompousness. To see him looking from one of us to another, so frankly pleased that we had returned, you could not have failed to know that he was sincere, and if any of us had had the least suspicion that Seth Upham had condoned the scheme to have us fall into the hands of the press-gang, he lost it there and then forever.

"But where," he cried, glancing down the deck, "where is Sim Muzzy?"

Matterson came a step nearer. I saw some of the sailors look curiously at one another. A stir ran along the deck.

It was Gideon North who replied. "I am told," he said

deliberately, letting his eyes wander from face to face, "that he has fallen into the clutches of a press-gang."

"What!"

"A press-gang. But of that, Lamont, here, can tell you better than I."

And Arnold, in his precise, subtly foreign way, told all that had happened.

Completely stunned, my poor uncle went to the rail and buried his face in his hands.

As for Matterson, he shook hands with Captain North and nodded at the rest of us impartially.

"I'm glad to see you back, sir," he said. "As you know, without doubt, I've shipped as chief mate."

"You've what?" Captain North thundered, looking up at the big man before him.

"Shipped as chief mate, sir."

"Is this true?" the captain demanded, turning on Uncle Seth.

"It is," my uncle replied like a man just waking. "Mr. Gleazen and I talked it over — "

Captain North interrupted him without ceremony. "Well," said he to Matterson, "I've no doubt you'll make a competent officer."

His abruptness left Matterson no excuse for replying; so, when the captain went below, the chief mate stepped over to the rail. There, frowning slightly now and then, he remained for a long time. It did not take Arnold Lamont's intuition to perceive that he, as well as Gleazen, was puzzled and disappointed by the way things had turned out.

CHAPTER XIV

LAND HO!

With Captain North back on board again, we felt great confidence for the future; and while we remained in Havana there was no other attempt, so far as I know, to do us harm. But there was that in the wind which kept us always uneasy; and at no time after the night when Sim Muzzy left us, never to return to the brig Adventure, did we have a moment of complete security.

Every one asked questions about poor Sim, and by the way the various ones received our answers they indicated much of their own attitude toward us. Abe Guptil was moved almost to tears, and most of the men forward shook their heads sympathetically, although in my presence, since I was not one of them, they said little. But Matterson would smile with a certain unkind satisfaction, and Neil Gleazen would laugh softly, and here and there some one or other of the men would make sly jests or cast sidelong glances at Arnold and me.

Of all the men on board, Seth Upham was conspicuously the most disturbed; and as he gloomily paced the deck,— a practice he continued even after Captain North had returned,— I heard him more than once murmuring to himself, "Sim, Sim, O my poor Sim! Into what a plight I have led you!"

Arnold and I suggested in the cabin that we send out a searching party to see what we could learn of Sim's fate, and Uncle Seth urged it madly upon the others; but Gleazen and Matterson would hear nothing of it, and even

Gideon North told us frankly that he regarded such measures as hopeless.

"The man's gone and I'm sorry," he said; "but I honestly believe it is useless for us to try to help him now."

So, reluctantly, we dropped the matter, after reporting it both to the local authorities and to our own consul; for however deeply we distrusted Gleazen and Matterson, in Captain North we had implicit faith.

To prepare for the voyage, we took on board in the next few days supplies of divers kinds, and though I had learned much by now of the ways of life at sea, many of the things puzzled me. One day it was a vast number of empty water-casks; another day, more than a hundred barrels of farina; yet another day, a boatload of beans and one of lumber. There were mysterious gatherings in the cabin from which Arnold and I were excluded,— we could not fail to notice that they took place when Captain North was ashore,— but to which gentry with dingy wristbands and shiny faces were bid; and presently we saw stowed away forward iron boilers and iron bars, a great box of iron spoons, a heap of rusty shackles, and still puzzling, although perhaps less so, a mighty store of gunpowder.

All this occasioned a long argument between Arnold and Captain North and myself, which fully enlightened me concerning the purpose of the mysterious supplies. But reluctant though we were to take the goods on board, there was nothing that we could do to stop it so long as my uncle, under Gleazen's influence, insisted on it; for as owner of the brig, and in that particular port where contraband trade played so important a part, he could have had us even jailed, if necessary, to carry his point. Our only way to serve him best in the end was to stand by in silence and let the stores, such as they were, go into the hold.

All the time my uncle came and went in a silence so deep that, if I had not now and then caught his eyes fixed upon me with a sadness that revealed, more than words, how unhappy he was, I could scarcely have believed that he was the same Seth Upham in whose house I had lived so long. From a person of importance in his own town and a leader among those of us who had set forth with him, he had fallen to a place so shameful that I felt for him the deepest concern, and for the precious villains that were thus dishonoring my mother's brother, the deepest anger.

"There are no pirates on the seas nowadays," I remarked one morning to Neil Gleazen who stood beside me watching all that went forward — and all the time I watched his face. "Why then should we set out armed to fight a sloop-of-war? Or ship a pair of small-swords on the cabin bulkhead?"

"Trade and barter, Joe," he replied. "The niggers fairly tumble over themselves to buy such tricks. There's money in it, Joe." Then he laughed as if mightily pleased with himself.

"But," I persisted, scarcely veiling my impatience, "you've said more than once that trade is not the object of our voyage."

"True, Joe." He lowered his voice. "But that's no reason to neglect a chance to turn our money over. Ah, Joe, you're a good lad, and we must have a bout with the foils some day soon. I'm sure we'll get along well together, you and I."

He smiled and clapped me on the shoulder; but the old spell was broken, and when he had gone, I ruminated for a long time on one thing and another that had occurred in the past months.

That evening, when Arnold and I stood with Gideon

North abaft the wheel where there was no one to overhear us, Arnold and the honest captain would have confirmed my worst suspicions, had they needed to be confirmed. But by then I had observed as much as they, and we talked only in such vague terms as pleased our mood.

"No! There's more to this voyage than has appeared on the surface even yet," Captain North said in an undertone.

"I have heard them talking in Spanish," said Arnold Lamont, "of gold — and of other things — of two men on the coast — and of a ship wrecked at the hour they needed her most. They share a great secret. They have come scarred through more than one fight and have lost the vessel on which they counted to make their fortunes. They are taking us back now, perhaps to fight for them, perhaps to run for them, but always as their creatures. So much I, too, have learned. We must walk circumspectly, my friends. We must keep always together and guard always against treachery. *Mon dieu!* what men they are!"

It was the longest speech I had ever heard Arnold make.

Next day, following the arrival of a boatload of as rascally looking mariners as ever attempted to ship on board a reputable vessel, there ensued a quarrel so sudden and violent and so directly concerned with our fortunes, that Arnold and I hung in breathless suspense on the issue.

"Gentlemen," Gideon North cried, hammering the cabin table with his fist, "as captain of this brig, I and I alone will say who shall ship with me and who shall not. I'll not have my crew packed with vagabonds and buccaneers. I'll turn those fellows back on shore, be it bag in hand and clothes upon them, or be it as stark naked as they came into this world, and I'll have you leave my crew alone from this day forth."

Matterson laughed lightly. "Ah, captain," he said, in

bitter sarcasm, "you are so excitable. They are able men. I'll answer for them."

"Mr. Matterson," the captain retorted, "it devolves upon you to answer for yourself, which bids fair to be no easy task."

"But," roared Gleazen, cursing viciously, "the owner says they're to come. And, by heaven, you'll cram them down your throat."

"Stuff and nonsense — "

By this time I felt that I could hold my peace no longer. Certainly I was party to whatever agreement should be reached. "You lie!" I cried to Gleazen, "the owner said nothing of the kind!"

"How about it, Seth, how about it?" Gleazen demanded, disdainfully ignoring me. "Speak out your orders, speak 'em out or — " the man's voice dropped until it rumbled in his throat " — or — you know what."

Poor Seth Upham had thought himself so strong and able and shrewd! So he had been in little Topham. But neither the quick wit nor the native courage necessary to cope with desperate, resolute men was left to him now.

"I — I — " he stammered. "Take one or two of them, Captain North, just one or two,— do that for me, I beg you,— and let the rest go."

"What!" exclaimed Gideon North.

"One or two?" Gleazen thundered, "one or two? Only one or two?"

Instantly both men had turned upon my uncle. Both men, their eyes narrowed, their jaws out-thrust, faced him in hot anger. There was a moment of dreadful silence; then, to my utter amazement, my uncle actually got down on his knees in front of Neil Gleazen, down on his marrow bones on the bare boards, and wailed, "In the name of Heaven, Neil, don't tell! Don't tell!"

While we stared at him, Gideon North, Arnold, and I, literally doubting what our eyes told us was the plain truth, Matterson said lightly, as if he were speaking of a sick and fretful child, "Let him have it, Neil. I hate scenes. Keep only Pedro."

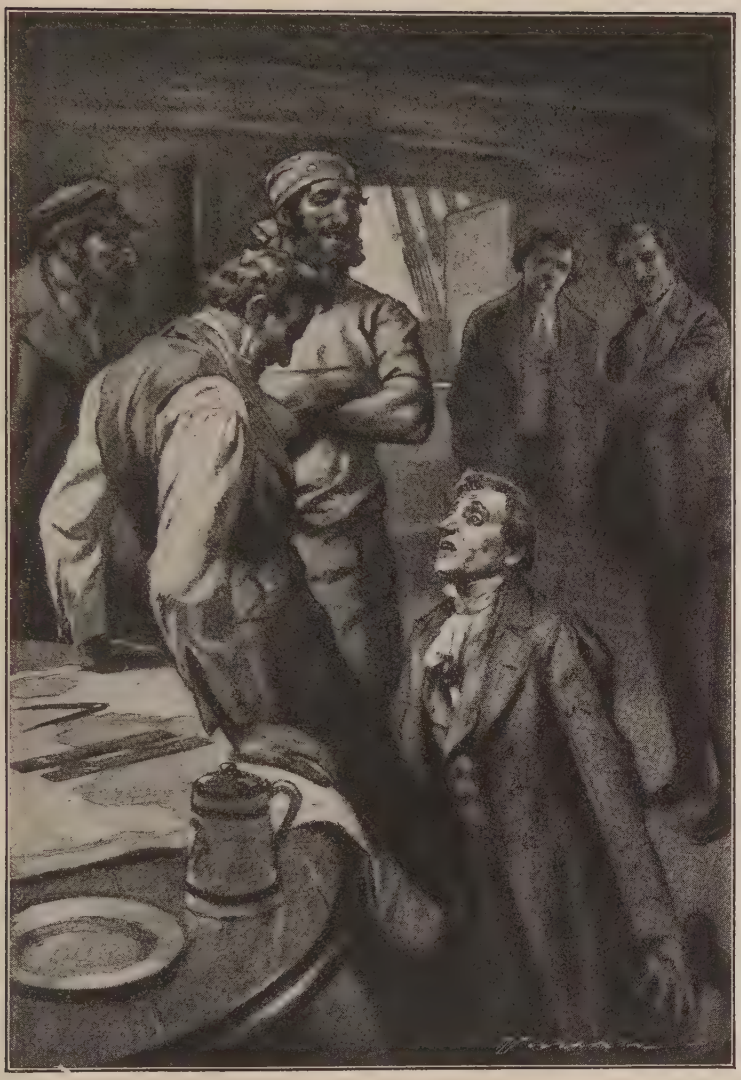
Gideon North looked first at my uncle, then at Matterson, and then back at my uncle. As if to a certain extent moved by the scene that we had just witnessed, he said no more; so of five strange seamen, next day all save one went ashore again.

That brief, fierce quarrel had revealed to us, as nothing else could have, into what a desperately abject plight my uncle had fallen. At the time it shocked me beyond measure. It was so pitifully, so inexpressibly disgraceful! In all the years that have passed since that day in Havana harbor I have not been able to forget it; to this moment I cannot think of it without feeling in my cheeks the hot blood of shame.

The man whom Matterson chose to keep on board the Adventure appeared to be a good-natured soul, and he went by the name of Pedro. What other name he had, if any, I never knew; but no seafaring man who ever met him needed another name. Years afterwards, down on old Long Wharf in Boston, I elicited an exclamation of amazement by saying to a sailor who had slyly asked me for the price of a glass of beer, "Did you ever know a seafaring man named Pedro who had a pet monkey?"

By his monkey I verily believe the man was known in half the ports of the world. He came aboard with the grinning, chattering beast, which seemed almost as big as himself, perched on his shoulder. He made it a bed in his own bunk, fed it from his own dipper, and always spoke affectionately of it as "my leetle frien'."

The beast was uncannily wise. There was something



"In the name of Heaven, Neil, don't tell! Don't tell!"

veritably Satanic in the leers with which it would regard the men, and before we crossed the ocean, as I shall relate shortly, it became the terror of Willie MacDougald's life.

So far as most of us could see, we were now ready to weigh anchor and be off; but by my uncle's orders we waited one day more, and on the morning of that day Uncle Seth and Neil Gleazen went on shore together.

When after a long absence they returned, they had words with Captain North; and though we had become used by now to quarrels between Gleazen and the captain, there was a different tone in this one, which puzzled Arnold and me.

Presently the two and my uncle went below, where Matterson joined them; and except for Willie MacDougald, Arnold and I might never have known what took place. But Willie MacDougald, knocking at our stateroom door that night, thrust his small and apparently innocent face into the cabin, entered craftily and said, "If you please, sir, I've got news worth a pretty penny."

"How much is it worth?" Arnold asked.

"A shilling," Willie whispered.

"That is a great deal of money."

"Ah, but I've got news that's worth it."

"I shall be the judge of that," Arnold responded.

Willie squinted up his face and whispered, "They've got new papers."

"How so?" Arnold demanded. He did not yet understand what Willie meant.

"Why, new papers. Portuguese papers."

"Ah," said Arnold. "Forged, I suppose? Shall we not sail under the American flag?"

"Ay, ay, sir, but the schooner Shark and the sloop of war Ontario are to be sent across for cruising."

"Ah!"

"And Seth Upham's sold the brig."

"Sold it!" Arnold exclaimed. For the moment both he and I thought that Willie was lying to us.

"Ay, ay, sir. To be delivered in Africa. Half the money down, and half on delivery."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, sir," said the crafty youngster, who understood better than either of us the various subterfuges to which African traders resorted in order to elude searching cruisers, "all they have to do to change registry is to say she's delivered to the new owners, and fly a new flag and show the bill of sale."

"Go on, go on. Must I drag the story from you word by word?"

"Captain North, sir, said he'd be hanged first; and Mr. Gleazen said he'd be hanged anyway; and ain't that worth two bits?"

Arnold flung a coin to the grasping little wretch, and he went out and closed the door behind him.

It was dark just outside our stateroom, and neither Willie nor we had been able to see anything that might have been there. For half a minute after Willie left us, while he was feeling his way toward the cabin, all was still. Then he suddenly shrieked so wildly that we leaped from our berths.

There was a sound of crashing and bumping. Even wilder shrieks filled the air, and we heard a curious chattering and mumbling. Something fell against the stateroom door and cracked a panel, the door flew open, and in toppled Willie with Pedro's monkey grasping him firmly by the throat from its perch on the little fellow's shoulders.

"Help, help!" Willie shrieked. "Lord save me! It's the devil! Help! I repent! I repent!" And he tripped and fell with a crash.

As he fell, the coin flew out of his hand, and the monkey, seeing the flash of silver, leaped after it, picked it up, fled like a lean brown shadow through the door, and was gone we knew not where.

To this day I am not able to make up my mind whether the child's anger or his fear was the greater. Turning like a flash, he saw what it was that had attacked him; yet he made no move to pursue the beast, and from that time on he regarded it with exceedingly great caution and nimbly and prudently betook himself out of its way. Canny, scheming, selfish Willie MacDougald!

At peep of dawn we got up our anchors and set sail and put out to sea, carrying with us heavy knowledge of perils and dangers that encompassed us, and sad memories of our old home in Topham, of our old friends in trouble, of high hopes that had fallen into ruin.

It comforted me to see Abraham Guptil working with the crew. He stood in good repute with every man on board, from Matterson and Gleazen to little Willie MacDougald, who now was in the steerage watching with great, round eyes all that went on about him. Good Abe Guptil! He, at least, concealed no diabolical craft beneath an innocent exterior.

I thought of Sim Muzzy. Poor Sim! Since he had disappeared that night in the clutches of the press-gang, nothing that we had been able to do had called forth a single word of his whereabouts. He had vanished utterly, and though neither Arnold nor I had ever felt any great affection for the garrulous fellow, we both were sincerely grieved to lose an old companion thus unhappily.

Now, as our sails filled, we swept past the Merry Jack and Eleanor, and the sight came to me like a shock of ill omen. The black disgrace of her lawless trade, the brutal men who manned her, the sinister experience that had fol-

lowed so closely our call upon her captain, all combined to make me feel that the shadow she had cast upon us was not easily to be evaded.

It was good to turn back once more to solid, substantial Gideon North, firm, wise Arnold Lamont, and kindly, trustworthy Abe Guptil. On them and on me Uncle Seth's fortunes and my own depended, if not indeed our very lives.

Mr. Matterson handled the brig from the forecastle and handled her ably. Not even Captain North, who watched him constantly with searching eyes, could find a thing of which to complain. His almost feminine voice took on a cutting quality that reached each man on board and conveyed by its hard, keen edge a very clear impression of what would happen if aught should go astray. But there was that about him which made it impossible to trust him; and Gleazen, seeming by his airs far more the owner than my poor, cowed uncle, stood by Gideon North and looked the triumph that he felt.

So we passed between the castle and the battery and showed our heels to Cuba and set our course across the sea and lived always on guard, always suspicious, yet never confirming further our suspicions, until, weeks later, the lookout at the masthead cried, "Land ho!"

The low, dark line that appeared far on the horizon, to mark the end of an uncommonly tranquil passage, so pleasantly in contrast to our voyage to Cuba, deepened and took form. There was excitement forward and aft. Gleazen and Matterson clapped hands on shoulders and roared their delight and cried that now,— they were vile-mouthed, profane men,— that now neither God nor devil should thwart them further.

Through the ship the word went from lip to lip that yonder lay the coast of Guinea.

It had become natural to us in the cabin to align ourselves on one side or the other. Gleazen and Matterson stood shoulder to shoulder, and Gideon North and Arnold Lamont and I gathered a little farther aft. We acted unconsciously, for all of us were intent on the land that we had raised; and my poor uncle, apparently assuming neither friend nor enemy, leaned against the cabin all alone. His face was averted and I could catch only a glimpse of his profile; but I was convinced that I saw his lip tremble.

Yonder, in truth, lay the coast of Guinea, and there at last every one of us was to learn the secret of that mad expedition which had so long since set forth from the little New England town of Topham.

IV

THREE DESPERATE MEN

CHAPTER XV

THE ISLAND

To the dark land on the sky-line, we swiftly drew nearer, and presently saw a low shore where a thread of gleaming white, which came and went, told us unmistakably that great seas were breaking. Of the exact point that we had reached on the coast we still were in doubt, for our charts were poor and Captain North suspected the quadrant of having developed some fault of a nature so technical that I neither understood it at the time nor now remember its name; so we hove to, while Gleazen and Matterson and Gideon North, and eventually Mr. Severance, of whom I saw less and thought more seldom than of any other man in the cabin, put their heads together and argued the matter.

Mr. Severance was a good enough man in his place, I suppose, but he was too indolent and self-centred, and too sleepily fond of his pipe, to command attention.

For all the headway that the four seemed to be making, they might have argued until the crack of doom, as far as I could see, when from the masthead came the cry, "Sail ho!"

Matterson and Gleazen faced about, as quickly as weasels on a stone wall, and Gideon North was not much behind them.

"Where away?"

"Off the larboard bow!"

"What do you make her out?" Captain North demanded.

"As yet, sir, she's too far off to be seen clearly."

I had known that we were sailing dangerous seas, but nothing else had so vividly brought our dangers home to me as did the scene of desperate activity that now ensued. Hoarse orders went booming up and down the decks. Men sprang to braces and halyards. For a moment the foresail, newly let fall, roared in the wind, then, clapping like thunder, it filled, as the men tailed on tack and sheet, and catching the wind, stiffened like iron. Wearing ship, we set every stitch of our canvas, and with a breeze that drove us like a greyhound through the long, swiftly running seas, went lasking up the coast of Africa, as, intently training glasses across the taffrail, we waited to see more of the strange vessel.

Notwithstanding our feverish efforts to elude her, she had drawn slowly nearer, and we made out that she was a schooner and as fleet as a bird. For a time there was talk of the armed schooner Shark, which our own government was reported to have sent out to cruise for slavers.

It was with grim interest that we watched her every manœuvre. Our men forward would constantly turn their heads to study her more closely, and those of us aft kept our eyes fixed upon her. Swift as was the Adventure, it was plain from the first that the schooner was outsailing her in a way that seemed almost to savor of wizardry.

"I swear I can see the hangman's knot in her halyard," Gleazen cried, and roundly braced his oath. "Never before did I feel such an itching on my neck."

At that Gideon North sternly said, "If she's a government vessel, gentlemen, I can assure you that we will not run from her. We have committed no crime; we carry no contraband. It is not government vessels I fear."

"There's reason in that, too!" Gleazen muttered. "Yes, I'd as soon swing, as go over the side with my throat slit." Then, caustically, he added, "No! Oh, no! We've no

contraband, you say. So we have n't. But we have enough water-casks for three hundred men, and lumber for extra decks, and shackles and nigger food."

Gideon North flamed red and started to respond angrily; but Matterson, with a sly smile, turned the argument off by saying lightly, "If she's the Shark she's sailing under false colors. See! She's broken out the flag of Spain."

"Humph," Captain North grunted, "she's a trader at best — "

"In either case, Captain North, she is outsailing us, for all our Baltimore bow and grand spread of canvas," Matterson interposed. "But never fear, Captain North, Gleazen and I have a way with us. We have no wish to meet with any ships of war, but from mere pirates and slavers we are not, I beg to assure you, in any great danger."

"Humph! The devil looks well after his own."

"The devil," Matterson retorted with an ironical smile, "is not so bad a master as some men would make him out to be."

Leaning on the rail, we silently watched the swift, strange schooner. Above the horizon, so perfectly did the bright canvas with the sun upon it blend into the background of sky, we could see only the black shadows that appeared on the sails just abaft the masts and stays; but her hull made a clean, bright line against the vivid blue of the sea, and against that same blue the foot of her mainsail stood out as sharp and white as if cut from bone. She continued to gain on us surely all that afternoon, but our apprehensions, which grew keener as she drew nearer, were allayed when she stood out to sea and gave us as wide a berth as we desired. She was a rarely beautiful sight, when, in the early evening, still far out at sea, she passed us; and remembering the Merry Jack and Eleanor

in Havana harbor, I could not bear to think that so graceful a craft might carry sordid sights and smells.

After a time, as the light changed, her sails turned to a slate-gray touched with dull blue, and with a great blotch of purple shadow down the middle, where mainsail merged into staysail and foresail, and foresail into jib. So grim, now, did she appear in the gathering darkness, that I could have believed almost anything of her. And now she was gone! Lost to sight! Vanished into the distant, almost uncharted waters of the great gulf! Only the memory of her marvelous swiftness and of the changing light on her sails was left to us — that and the memory of one more angry encounter with Gleazen and Matterson.

That night, while we lay in those long slow seas which roll in upon the African coast, the two spent hours by the taffrail in low-voiced conversation, and Gideon North sat below over his charts and papers, and Arnold and I strolled about the deck, arm in arm, talking of one project and another. But my uncle, Seth Upham, the man who owned the Adventure, paced the deck alone in the moonlight, now with his head bent as if under the weight of a heavy burden, now with his head erect and with an air of what seemed at some moments wild defiance. An odor of tobacco drifted back to us on the wind from where the carpenter and the sailmaker were smoking together, and we heard the voices of men in the forecastle.

When, at daybreak, we resumed our course up the coast, we knew that we were near the end of our journey, for Gleazen and Matterson were constantly conferring together and with Gideon North; and a dozen times in two hours, one or the other of them charged the masthead man to keep a smart lookout.

Now Gleazen would lean his elbows on the rail and search the horizon; now he would hand the glass to Mat-

terson and stride the deck in a fury of impatience. Below, the log-book lay open on the cabin table at a blank page, on which there was a rough pencil-sketch of coast and a river and an island. On a chart, which lay half open across a chair, someone had drawn a circle with a pair of compasses, half on land and half on sea; and when Arnold silently drew my attention to it, I saw that in the circle someone had penciled the same sketch that I had seen on the blank page of the log-book.

Coast, river, and island! We studied the sketch in silence and talked of it afterward.

That evening, for the first time in many hours, we came on Captain North alone by the rail.

"Someone has drawn an island on the chart," said Arnold, slowly.

Gideon North growled assent.

"Well?" said Arnold.

"It would seem that the blithering idiots don't know its bearings within a hundred miles, and yet they expect me to bring it straight aboard. One says thus and so; t'other says so and thus. Gleazen talked loudest and I took his word first — like a fool, for he's no navigator. I'd not put such foolishness beyond Seth Upham, but the others ought to know better. Aye! And they do know better."

"What island?" I demanded.

He shot a keen glance at me.

"Hm! Have they said naught to you?"

"Not a word."

Arnold was smiling.

"Nor to you?" Gideon North demanded, seeing him smile.

"Nor to me."

"Then," said he, "you two know less than I, and I know little enough."

"If you know more than we, pray tell us what you can?"

"After all," said he, "I only know that we are looking for an island, and that when we find it the deviltry is yet to begin — " He smiled grimly. "We'll yet have a chance to see sparks fly from those weapons Gleazen hung in the cabin. I hear he's a clever man at the smallsword."

When he said that, Captain North looked at Arnold and me as if to question us.

"Clever?" I replied. "Yes, he's clever, though — "

I then saw that Arnold was smiling. I remembered seeing him smile when Gleazen and I were fencing on the green. I remembered his saying that he had not been laughing at me. And now he was smiling again!

I stammered with embarrassment and clumsily concluded, "But — but not so very — perhaps not very clever."

In the waist I heard Gleazen call in a low voice, "Masthead! You there, wake up!"

"Ay-ay, sir," came the man's reply.

"Not so loud," said Gleazen. "Have you seen no lights — no land?"

"No lights, sir, and no land but the coast yonder, which we've seen these two days."

I could just make out that Gleazen was leaning on the bulwark and staring into the northeast.

"Did you hear that?" Captain North asked in a whisper.

We both had heard it.

"I'm thinking," Captain North presently muttered, "that we're like to see more land than will be good for us. Mark the sky to westward."

It was banked with clouds.

The island, when we found it, which we did early next

day, proved to be low and flat and marshy. Behind it, exactly according to the sketch in the log-book and on the chart, lay the mouth of a river. On the mainland in each direction, as far as we could see, and on the bar at the mouth of the river, and on the outer shore of the island, which seemed to be in the nature of a delta, although with deep water behind it where the flow of the river appeared to have kept a Y-shaped channel open, a great surf broke with muffled roar; and in the channel a ruffle of choppy waves indicated that stream and tide combined to make a formidable current.

As we bore down on it, Gleazen and Matterson and Seth Upham drew apart and stood smiling as they talked together in undertones. But Captain North and Mr. Severance and some of the older sailors were studying sky and wind and currents, and their frowns indicated that much was amiss.

To me, watching Gleazen and Matterson, it seemed strange that men who but a little while ago had been so fiercely eager should all at once become as subdued as deacons before the communion table; and it was only when I edged around until I could see Gleazen's face that I suspected the wild glee that the man was restraining. The light in his eyes and the change in his expression so fascinated me that for the moment I almost forgot Arnold Lamont and Gideon North and the alliance that bound us together, almost forgot my poor uncle and his wild hopes, almost forgot the very island whose low and sedgy shores we were approaching.

"Gentlemen," cried Captain North,— his voice startled me as much as those whom he addressed,— "would you wreck this vessel by keeping me here on a lee shore with heaven only knows what weather brewing? Look for yourselves at those clouds in the southwest. If this harbor, of

which you were talking yesterday, is within fifty miles of us, we must run for it. If not, we must stand off shore and prepare to ride out the storm."

"The harbor, Captain North," Matterson returned, his light voice hard with antagonism, "is much less than fifty miles from here. You will lay by for one hour while we go ashore on that island yonder; then I will pilot you to harbor."

"*Mister Matterson!*" said Captain North calmly, turning on the giant of a man beside him, "are you mate or master?"

"Captain North," Matterson very quietly replied, "I am mate of this vessel, and as mate I do not dictate. Have I not worked faithfully and well on this voyage? Have I not carried out every order of yours?"

It was true, for to the surprise of Gideon North and Arnold and myself, he had made a first-class mate.

"But I also am a friend of the owner and as friend of the owner, I spoke just now, forgetting my place as mate. I ask you to pardon me."

In his words and his manner there was something so oily and insincere that from the bottom of my heart I distrusted him, and so, obviously enough, did Gideon North. But the man's sudden change of front took the weapons, so to speak, out of the captain's hands; and before he could reply Matterson said, "Mr. Upham, what are your wishes in the matter?"

I looked first at my uncle, then I looked back at Matterson, and as I looked at Matterson, I caught a glimpse over his shoulder of Neil Gleazen, who was staring at Uncle Seth with a scowl on his brow and with his lips moving. Turning again to my uncle, I once more saw on his face, now so weak, the pathetically timid expression that I had come to know so well.

"If there's no immediate danger— " he began.

"There's none at all!" Matterson and Gleazen cried with one voice.

"Then let us go ashore, say for merely half an hour."

Captain North, with a shrug as of resignation, put the trumpet to his lips and gave orders that brought the brig into the wind with sails ashiver.

"Come, lads," Gleazen cried to Arnold and me, "the more the merrier."

So into the boat we climbed, and I for one was pleased to find that Abe Guptil had an oar.

It was about half a mile from the brig to the island, and when we reached it and hauled out the boat, I pushed ahead of the others. Climbing from the edge of the water up the little incline at the head of the beach, I saw first of all, on the farther shore a quarter of a mile away, the ribs and broken planking of a wrecked ship. Then, before I had taken another step, I saw some little creature running through the grass and looked after it eagerly, to discover what strange kind of animal would inhabit so barren and remote an isle.

At first I saw only that the animal was long and gray. Then it came out into plain sight, and I saw that it was a rat — an ordinary rat such as I had seen by the hundreds in old barns and in old ships. And how, I wondered, had an ordinary rat, such as might slink along the wharves at Boston, come to live on that lonely island? Before an answer occurred to me, I saw another running away in a different direction, and another and another. I stopped short and looked about me. Here, there, everywhere were rats. The island was peopled with them. With big gray rats! Then I looked at the bones of that wrecked ship, which stuck up out of the water, and knew that I had found the answer to my question. They were rats from

that ship; they had come ashore when she was wrecked.

What they lived on, I never knew; but there they had flourished and multiplied and formed in the midst of those blue seas a great rat empire.

"Rats!" I heard Gleazen exclaim. "Pfaw! How I hate them!"

Throwing sticks ahead of him to drive away the lean, gray vermin, he started across the marshy land toward the old wreck, and the rest of us fell in behind him.

Of us all, Matterson showed the least repugnance for the multitude of snaky little beasts that swarmed around us at a distance and watched us with angry eyes as black as shoe buttons.

And now we came to the wreck and saw a sight that filled me with horror. In the hold, into which we could look through holes between the ribs and between the beams where the waves had torn away the spar deck, there were five human skeletons chained by their ankle-bones to the timbers. Yet, so far as there was any outward sign, I was the only one to see the skeletons.

Matterson and Gleazen looked long and sadly at the old hulk, and Gleazen finally said, "She's done for and gone, Molly. There's not a thing left about her that's worth salving."

Matterson gloomily nodded. "Mr. Upham," said he, "we lost two hundred prime niggers that night."

I turned away from them, as they stood there talking, and went back to the boat. It would be good, I thought while I waited, to leave the island forever.

Whatever the outcome of their talk may have been, the rising wind presently brought them back to the boat in a hurry. We launched her, and tumbled aboard, drenched from head to foot, and after a lively struggle came up alee of the brig. It was plain that we must soon seek shelter,

for already the storm was blowing up and the waves came charging down upon us in fierce, racing lines.

"Yonder island," Matterson was saying, at the same time marking a diagram on the palm of one hand with the forefinger of the other, "yonder island is part of the delta of the Rio Polo. It runs so — and so — and all but the island is washed away. You see, do you not, gentlemen? If Captain North will run straight so,— northeast by east, say,— holding his bearings by the angle of ripples where you see the current veer, and when we are four cables' lengths from the breakers give me the wheel, I will take her over the bar."

"Mr. Matterson — "

"The responsibility is mine, Captain North, by the owner's orders."

"Ah, Mr. Upham," said the captain, with a wry smile, "and is this the kind of support you give me?"

Not one word did my uncle say.

I had seen Pedro's monkey for a while playfully swinging from rope to rope and later scratching its ear as it sat on the companion hatch; but I had not seen it go below, nor had any of the others. To this day no one knows just how it evaded us, for it was forbidden the cabin, and every man on board had orders to head it off if it showed any inclination to go there. Yet the mischievous beast did slip below, and for once succeeded in catching Willie MacDougald off his guard.

Willie, it seems, had been engaged in the praiseworthy occupation of spying on Neil Gleazen, and had one eye firmly fixed to the keyhole of the cabin door when the monkey calmly jabbed teeth and claws into the luckless boy's leg.

His yell startled every man on deck; but far more than

it startled us did it startle the man in the cabin, who had thought himself safe from peeping eyes.

First we heard Willie yelling with all the power of his brazen little throat; then the cabin door was flung open with a bang; then suddenly Willie and the monkey literally flew out of the companionway and alighted on deck.

The fall was short and neither was much hurt. But when each tried to escape from the other, both started to run in the same direction and Willie, tripping, fell on the monkey. At that, the monkey grabbed Willie's head with its front claws, raked its hind claws across his face, then snatching out two good handfuls of hair, fled triumphantly aloft.

Gleazen burst out on deck at that very instant, and seeing nothing of Willie who — luckily for him! — had fallen out of sight round the corner of the cabin, started into the rigging, swearing to skin the monkey alive.

Meanwhile Matterson was like to have died laughing at Willie MacDougald,— and, indeed, so were the rest of us! — for between anger and fear, and with half a dozen long scratches across his cheeks, he was in a sad state of mind. I tell you, any ideas of his innocent childhood that we may have entertained completely vanished before the flood of oaths that the little wretch was pouring out, when Gideon North collared him and sent him below with stinging ears.

And now, since all that takes so long to tell happened quickly, the breakers were close aboard, when Gleazen, who had followed the scapegrace monkey to the mizzen royal yard, roared in that great voice of his: —

"Sail ho! By heaven, there's a cruiser in the offing."

He came down the rigging like a cat, bawling orders as he came, and at the same time Gideon North was giving counter-orders. It seemed for a moment that in that scene

of confusion, which suddenly from comedy had changed to the grimmest of grim earnest, we should go on beam-ends into the surf.

Seas such as I had never dreamed of were breaking on the bar before us. Overhead a storm was gathering. In the offing, it was reported, there sailed a strange and hostile ship. And in the brig Adventure there were contradictory orders and tangled ropes and men working at cross purposes.

Say what you will against Matterson in most respects, in that emergency he was the man who saved us. Throwing the helmsman from the wheel so violently that he fell clean over the companion ladder and down to the spar-deck, he seized the wheel and cried in a voice as hard as steel, "Gleazen, be still! Be still, I say! Now, Captain North, with head yards aback and after yards braced for the starboard tack, we'll make it."

Captain North, with an able man at the wheel,— to pay the devil his due,— gave orders in swift succession and the brig came back on her course and rose to meet the breakers. How Matterson so surely and confidently found the exact channel, I do not know. But this I do know: he took the brig in through the breakers without the error of as much as a hair's breadth, straight in along the channel, with never a mark to guide him that I could see, except the belt of tidal chop and the eddies of the intermingling currents, to the comparative quiet of the mouth of a river that led away before us into the mazes of vast swamps and tangled waterways, where mangroves and huge interweaving, overhanging vines and sickly sweet flowers grew in all the riotous luxury of tropical vegetation.

To me the calm river seemed an amazing haven from every danger that we had encountered outside. But not so to Matterson.

Looking back at the thundering breakers, he thoughtfully shook his head.

"Well," said Gleazen significantly, "if worst comes to worst, we can fight."

"If worst comes to worst."

"Well?"

Matterson shook himself like a dog. "It's the niggers," he said in a low voice. "If them infernal witch doctors get wind of us!"

Gleazen stared a long time into the mangroves.

"It ain't as if we could take an army," Matterson continued. "We've got to take only them we *know* — *know*, mind you. What'd our lives be worth if all these here — " he waved his hand at the crew forward — "if all these here knew. It would pay 'em well to knock us on the head."

Still Gleazen stared silently into the tangled swamp.

"It would pay 'em well," Matterson repeated.

CHAPTER XVI

STRANGEST OF ALL

Even had I not suspected already that Matterson had brought vessels into the mouth of that river many times before, I could not have doubted it after seeing him bring the Adventure through the narrow channel across the bar, and up to the mouth of the river itself. I marveled that, having been more than a year away from it,— how much more than a year I did not know,— he dared even attempt the passage. But whatever his faults, indecision and fear were not among them, and he had justified his bold course by bringing us safely within the sheltering bar, where the lookouts reported minute by minute every movement of the suspicious distant sail, which approached until from the deck we could see her courses, and then wore ship to haul off shore before the storm caught her.

"Bah! The cruising curs!" Matterson scornfully exclaimed. "Captain North, shall I continue to serve as pilot and take the brig up the river?"

"Since up the river it seems we are to go," Captain North returned stiffly, "I place the helm and all responsibility in your hands, Mr. Matterson." With that he folded his arms and, with a nod to Seth Upham, withdrew to the weather-rail.

My poor uncle!

Never was there merer figurehead than he as owner of the brig Adventure. It was pathetic to see him try to maintain his dignity and speak and answer smartly, even sharply as of old, when every man on board knew that if that reckless, high-handed pair, Gleazen and Matterson,

were at any time to cease tolerating him, his life would be worth no more than the flame of a snuffed candle. He must have been perfectly well aware of the weak part he had played, yet he held up his head and boldly returned Gideon North's glance and nod.

Meanwhile Matterson had climbed to the masthead and with glass at eye was studying the stranger. Now he came slowly down again, and said to Gleazen, "She's bearing off in good faith to ride out the storm, Neil. What say? Shall we anchor here behind the bar?"

Gleazen shook his head.

"There's fair shelter," Matterson persisted.

Gleazen waved his hand at the black sky. "But not shelter enough," he said.

"If we go up the river," said Matterson in a low voice, "the news will spread from here to the hills."

Gleazen smiled unpleasantly. "Look off the larboard bow," he said.

We all turned, as did Matterson, and I for one, at first, saw nothing except the vines and great trees on which fell the shadows of the premature twilight that foreran the storm. But Matterson cried out, and Arnold Lamont, seeing my blank expression, touched my arm and pointed at a dark lane of water and said, "See — there — there!"

Then I saw something moving, and made out a canoe. In the canoe was a big black negro, with round eyes and flat nose and huge, puffed-out lips. The negro was paddling. Then I saw something else. I could not believe my eyes. I turned to the others, and knew by their faces that they and Arnold had seen it, too, and that Seth Upham had not.

Then Gleazen, who was looking hard at Matterson, said with an oath, "The beer is spilt. It's up the river for us."

And Matterson nodded.

In that canoe, which had already swiftly and silently disappeared among the mangroves, I had seen a white girl.

I cannot describe her to you now as she then appeared in the canoe, sitting in front of the great, black canoeman. It was long ago, and even at the time I was so startled, so amazed, that I saw only her white face and great dark eyes looking out at me from the shadowy recesses of the swamp.

I felt as if I had been set down suddenly in the midst of a fairy story. I strove against a sense of mystery and danger, a thousand vague terrors.

I cannot tell you what the girl looked like; yet, though I seem to deal in contradictions, I have never forgotten that white frightened face and those dark eyes, which had disappeared as mysteriously as they had come.

Then, as the sails filled and the Adventure fell off and got steerage-way and slipped up the great, swift river, Matterson spun the wheel with his own hands this way and that.

At first the shores were low and sedgy and covered deeply with mangroves; but soon the river widened into a vast mirror, in which we saw reflected towering trees of numberless varieties, with a trailing network of vines and flowers, and from among the leaves, which were unbelievably large, spears of bamboo and cane protruded. As the wind at our backs drove us slowly up stream, notwithstanding the swifter current where we passed through the narrows, we saw plantains, bananas, oranges, lemons, and tall palms. Then between the trunks we saw fields of rice; and then, as we turned a bend where the river once more widened, we saw a settlement before us.

In the centre of a clearing stood low houses built of cane and thatched with grass, mud huts grouped here and there, and a large enclosure for some purpose of which I

was ignorant. Could the girl I had seen in the swamp have come thither? On all sides people were running this way and that, some of them white, but most of them as black as midnight. So small did the settlement appear, and so sharply was each figure outlined, that it looked for all the world like a toy village in a shop window, or like such a tiny model of a foreign town as sailors sometimes bring home from distant ports.

As the anchor gripped the bed of the river, and the men, spraddling out on the footropes and leaning over the yards, clewed up the sails and hauled in the great folds of canvas, the Adventure brought up on her cable and lay with her head into the current.

Matterson and Gleazen who had ordered a boat launched and were standing in the gangway, now turned and called to Uncle Seth, who responded by walking toward them with as haughty a manner as if he were heart and soul in their councils and their plans. All three of them got into the boat and there talked for a while in undertones. Then they called Willie MacDougald to come tumbling after them, and all together they hastily went ashore, where I saw that a crowd had gathered to meet them; then the storm, which had so long been threatening, broke with a roar of wind and rain, and Arnold and I, going below, had the cabin for a time to ourselves.

Arnold sat down by the cabin table and looked around at ports and doors, and at the dueling swords on the bulkhead, and up at the skylight on which the storm was fiercely beating.

"You, too," he said, with a quiet smile, "you, too, Joe, look around at the cabin of this good brig. It has not been a pleasant place to live, but I do believe there are times coming when we shall wish ourselves back again in this very spot."

"And what have you learned now of our friends' plans?" I asked.

"One does not have to learn so much, Joe."

"But what?"

Arnold, I knew, was smiling at my impatience, although the light was so nearly gone that I saw him, when he bent forward, only as a deeper shadow in the darkness. Yet the ports and the skylight still were clear enough to be reflected in his eyes when he leaned very close to me, and whatever his doubts, I saw that he showed no sign of fear.

"They talked yesterday and to-day — in Spanish — of the men they call Bud and Bull, who share the secret that has brought us all the way from Top — Hark!"

Arnold half rose. I myself heard a soft step. When Arnold lifted his hand I saw his knife, now drawn, so far as I knew, for the first time in apprehension of treachery. Then the step — so soft and low — sounded again. I reached for my own pistol. The sound was repeated yet again. It was just outside the door. Then into the cabin crept a low ambling creature, which we both knew at once must be Pedro's monkey.

Arnold laughed quietly and sat down again and breathed deeply.

"They have discovered — something," he whispered, as if we had suffered no interruption.

"That I know well," I said. "But what?" I believed that I, too, had ferreted out the secret, but I was not yet willing to hazard my surmises.

"Sh!" He raised his hand to warn me. "Do you not guess?" he whispered. "Try! Until they have got what they have found to the sea, you and I are safe. They must have men to help them who will not turn and rob them. They do not believe in the saying about honor among thieves."

"Come," I cried, "stop speaking in riddles. Tell me!" Then, thinking of Cornelius Gleazen as I first had seen him, with the rings flashing on his fingers, I popped out a word that began with D.

Arnold smiled and nodded.

"Well," I returned, "speak up and tell me if such a voyage as we have come upon is not a far-fetched manner of approaching such an errand as you have described."

"In a sense, yes. In a sense, no. They are after other things, too. This good vessel, as we have remarked before, is well found for the trade."

Suddenly, he gave me a start by beginning to whistle a lively tune and to drum on the table. His quick ear had detected another step in the companionway. As the step drew near, the monkey, which in our absorption we had quite forgotten, pattered toward the door and slipped out.

"What's that? Who's here? Who passed me then?" It was Captain North.

Arnold struck a spark into tinder and lighted a candle.

"And what, pray, are you two doing here in the dark?" the captain demanded.

"We are passing time with talk of our good friends, Gleazen and Matterson," said Arnold.

With an angry exclamation, Captain North took the chair opposite us.

"Well," said he, "matters have turned out as any sane man might have known they would. That precious little scamp of a cabin boy will tell you no more tales, Lamont."

"You mean —"

"I'll wager half my wages for the voyage that you and I have seen the last of him. The monkey betrayed the little scamp after all."

Although I knew that Willie MacDougald's innocent and childlike face masked a scheming, rascally mind, I

could not so calmly see the little fellow go, soul and body, into the power of such men as Gleazen and Matterson, or perhaps worse; and although neither Arnold nor Gideon North, appraising Willie at his true worth, cared a straw what became of him, I was so troubled by his probable fate that I did not listen to the others, who were talking coolly enough about our own predicament, but, instead, got up and walked around the cabin.

It seemed very strange to listen to the roaring wind and driving rain and yet feel the brig lying quiet underfoot in the strong, deep current of the river. Now I sat down and listened to a few sentences of their talk; now I got up and once more paced the cabin. For a while I thought about Willie MacDougald; then I thought of the dangers that surrounded us all, and of poor Uncle Seth, once so bold and arrogant, now become little better than a cowardly, pitiful wretch; then I thought of the girl I had seen in the jungle, and strangely enough the memory of her face seemed at once to quiet my wilder fancies and to enable me to think more clearly than before.

Becoming aware at last that the storm was passing, I went on deck and saw lights in the clearing where the houses stood. The wind, which had come upon us so suddenly and so fiercely, was subsiding as suddenly as it had arisen, and a deep calm pervaded river, clearing, and jungle. I had not waited ten minutes before I heard the boat on the water.

"I swear," I heard Gleazen say in an angry, excited voice, "I swear they're lying to us. Bud'll tell us. News travels fast hereabouts. Bud'll be here soon."

They came on board, one at a time, all but Willie MacDougald. Of him there was neither sign nor word. I started forward to question them, then stopped short. Something in their attitude froze and repelled me. Of

what use were questions — then, at any rate? For a moment they waited in the gangway, then, all together, they went aft.

Leaving them and moving to the farther side of the brig, I looked a long time into the dark, tangled jungle. The clouds had gone and the stars had come out and the dying wind spoke only in slow, distant soughs among the leaves. So blackly repellent was the matted and decaying vegetation, through which dark veins of stagnant water ran, and so grimly silent, that I could not keep from shuddering with a sort of childish horror. Surely, I thought, human beings could not penetrate such depths. Then, almost with my thought, there came across the dark and fever-laden waters of the great swamp, out of the black jungle night, a thread of golden melody. Someone in that very jungle was whistling sweetly an old and plaintive tune.

I heard the three, Gleazen, Matterson, and my uncle, turn to listen. By lantern light I saw their faces as they looked intently toward the jungle. So still had the brig now become, that I actually heard them breath more quickly.

Then Neil Gleazen cried, "By the Holy, that's either Bud O'Hara or his ghost."

With both hands cupped round his mouth, he was about to send a hoarse reply roaring back across the river, when Matterson clutched his hand.

"Be still," he whispered. "Here's the answer."

And he, in turn, sent back the answering phrase of that singularly mournful and haunting ballad: "I Lost my Love in the Nightingale."

CHAPTER XVII

THE MAN FROM THE JUNGLE

VERY slowly Matterson whistled that old tune, "The Nightingale," and very slowly an answer came back to us; then a long silence ensued. The black water of the marsh rose and fell. We could hear it whispering softly as it washed against the tangled roots of the mangroves, and once in a while I could distinguish the long, faint rasp of some branch or vine that dragged across another. But except for those small noises, the place was as still as a house of death; and as we watched and waited, the feeling grew upon me that we must be in the midst of a dream.

Then something moved and caught my eye, and a canoe silently shot out upon the river. With a swish and swirl of paddles, she came alongside us and stayed for a moment, like a dragon-fly pausing in its flight, then shot silently back the way she had come. I had seen against the water that there were three men in the canoe when she came; but when she slipped back into the mangroves, I saw that there were only two.

Before I had time to question the reason of all this, I saw a man's head rise above the bulwark and knew that he had sprung from the canoe to the chains while the little craft so briefly paused.

Climbing over the bulwark and dropping to the deck, the man said in low, cautious voice, "Is it Neil I've been hearing? And Molly?"

"Here we be, Bud, us two and Seth Upham."

"And sure, do this fine vessel be ours, Neil?"

"Ours she is, along with Seth Upham. Come, Bud, here

is Mr. Upham, who has joined in with us and gets a half-and-half lay, and here — "

"O Neil," the mysterious newcomer drawled, "would he be comin' for naught short of half shares? And where's Molly? Ah, Molly, you've been long away."

They all were shaking hands together.

"And now," said Matterson, "what news of Bull?"

"Of Bull, is it?" the man replied. "Sure, he's sitting on the chest o' treasure. Warnings they give us, that the hill is haunted and all such. Spirits, you know, Neil; spirits, Molly. Sure the niggers know more about them things than we do — indeed they do. It's not I would go agin them rashly. But I fixed 'em, lads."

"How?" asked Matterson softly.

"Bull laughed at them fit to kill,— which is his way, as you'll remember,— but not I. Says I, 'Laugh if you will; 't is well to be fearless since you're the one to stay.' But I did for him better than the stiff-necked rascal would do for himself. That night I hunted me out an old master wizard and paid him in gold, and did n't he give me a charm that will keep spirits away?"

To hear a sober white man talk of charms with all the faith of a credulous child amazed me. I had never dreamed there could be such a man. Pressing closer, I took a good look at this queer stranger, and saw him to be a short, broad fellow, with a square jaw and a face so intelligent that my amazement became even greater.

He, in turn, saw me looking at him, and half in a drawl, half in a brogue, asked, "Now who'll this one be?"

"He's the young man that came with Mr. Upham," Gleazen replied.

"Is he fearless?" asked the strange Bud. "And is he honest? — Aye," he rather testily added, "and is he, too, to share half-and-half?"

To that Gleazen returned no answer, but the man's tone made me think of Gleazen himself roaring drunk and staggering away from Higgleby's barn, of Matterson with his voice hardened to a cutting edge, of the master of the Merry Jack and Eleanor, and of the adventurous night when we parted from poor Sim Muzzy. I tell you honestly, I would have given every cent I had in the world and every chance I had of fortune to have been fifteen hundred leagues away.

Turning to Matterson, the man went on: "'T is not discreet for the like o' you two to come sailing in by broad daylight with all sail set. Now why could n't ye ha' come in a boat, say, and let the brig lie off the coast. Then we could 'a' met secret-like and 'a' got away and up the river with no one the wiser. Sure, and there's not a soul in a thousand miles, now, that ain't heard a tale o' Neil and Molly."

"The storm was hard upon us," said Matterson.

"And a cruiser lay in the offing," said Gleazen.

"It would be possible, then," the man returned, "that ye 're not as big — not *quite* as big fools as I took ye to be."

Then, as if all had been arranged beforehand, while Matterson and the strange man and Uncle Seth went below to the cabin, Gleazen took me by the arm and led me away from the others.

"Joe," he murmured,— and I saw a new, eager glint in his eyes,— "Joe, there's great times coming. I've made up my mind I can trust you, Joe, and I'm going to make you my lieutenant. Yes, sir, I'm going to make you an officer."

I wondered what kind of story he would tell next, for by this time I knew him far too intimately to be deceived by his brazen flattery. It was singularly trying for me, man grown that I was, to be treated with an air of patron-

age that a stripling would have resented, and there were moments when I was like to have turned on Gleazen with a vengeance. But I waited my time. It was not hard to see that my patience need not endure interminably.

"You, Joe, are one of us," he continued, "and we're glad to take you into our confidence. But these others — " he waved his hand generally — "we can't have 'em know too much. Now we're going to-night to get things sized up and ready, and what I want to know, Joe, is this: will you — as my lieutenant, you understand — take Arnold and Mr. Severance and Captain North ashore to call on Mr. Parmenter?"

"But who," I asked, "is Mr. Parmenter?"

"He's an Englishman, Joe, and if you can sort of convey to him — you know what I mean — that we're after hides and ivory, purely a matter of trade, it'll be a good thing, Joe. Mind you, as my lieutenant, Joe."

Never had I been so *Joe'd* in all my life before. When Gleazen had gone, I fairly snorted at my sudden and easy honors. Evidently he told much the same story to the others, except Captain North, with whom Gleazen himself very well knew that such a flimsy yarn was not likely to prevail, and to whom Uncle Seth, accordingly, entrusted some genuine business; and half an hour later we gathered at the rail to go ashore.

"Now, then," Captain North said peremptorily, in such a way that I knew he was entirely unaware of my recent appointment as Gleazen's lieutenant, "now then, lads, into the boat all hands together."

"One moment!" I cried. "I forgot something." And with that I ran back.

In changing my jacket in honor of the call we were to make, I had left my pistol behind me. Of no mind to put off without it, I hurried down to my stateroom.

Passing through the cabin, I saw that the four men, Gleazen, Matterson, the strange Bud, and my uncle, were drawing up around the great table, on which they had carelessly thrown a pack of cards. They gave me frowns and hard looks as I passed, and I heard them muttering among themselves at the interruption; but with scarcely a thought of what they said, I left them to their game.

No sooner had our boat crunched on the shore than on all sides black figures appeared from the darkness, and landing, we found ourselves surrounded by negroes, who pressed upon us until we fairly had to thrust them back with oars. It was the first time I had set foot on the continent of Africa, and the place and the people and the circumstances were all, to my New England apprehension, so extraordinary and so alarming that I cast a reluctant glance back at the dim lights of the Adventure. But now a door opened, and I saw in the bright rectangle a white man in European clothes; and we went up and shook his hand,— which seemed for some reason to displease him, although he did not actually refuse it,— and were ushered into a large room with a board floor and chairs and tables and pictures, for all the world as if it were a regular house.

"Under some circumstances I should no doubt be glad to meet you, gentlemen," he said, with cold reserve, "for no ship has visited us for more than three months. But we hereabouts are not friendly to slavers."

"Nor are we," Gideon North retorted.

"I think, sir," said Arnold Lamont, soberly and precisely, "that you mistake our errand."

He looked at us a long time without saying more, then he quietly remarked, "I hope so."

His cold, measured words repelled us and set us at an infinite distance from him.

We looked at one another and then at him, and he in turn studied us.

We four — for Mr. Severance had accompanied us, although as usual he scarcely opened his mouth — saw a man whose iron-gray hair indicated that he was a little beyond middle age. The lamp that burned beside him revealed a strong, rather sad face; the book at his elbow was a Bible. It came to me suddenly that he was a missionary.

"You give us chill welcome, sir," said Gideon North. "What, then, will you have us do to prove that we are not what you believe us?"

"Your leaders who were here a little while ago," our host replied, "tried their best to prove it — and failed. Indeed, had I not seen them, I should more readily believe you. It is not the first time that I have seen some of them, you must remember."

Gideon North bit his lip. "Have you considered," he asked, "that we may not be in accord with them?"

"A man must be known by the company he keeps."

"We are in *neither* sympathy nor accord with them."

"It is a virtue, sir, no matter what your circumstances, to be at least loyal to your associates. If you so glibly repudiate your friends, on what grounds should a stranger trust you?"

At that Gideon North got up all hot with temper. "Sir," he cried, "I will not stay to be insulted."

"Sir," the man returned, "I have insulted, and would insult, no one."

"Of that, sir," Gideon North responded, "I will be my own judge."

"Captain North," said Arnold, "have patience. One moment and we —"

Turning in the door, which he had reached in two strides, our captain cried hotly, "Come, men, come! I tell you, come!"

Mr. Severance followed him in silence; Arnold stepped forward as if to restrain him, and I, left for a moment with the missionary, turned and faced him with all the dignity of which I was master.

"I am sorry that you think so ill of us," I said.

"I am sorry," he replied, "to see a youth with an honest face in such a band as that."

I could think of no response and was about to turn and go, when I suddenly remembered our lost cabin boy.

"Can you, in any case," I asked, "tell me what has become of our cabin boy, Willie MacDougald?"

"Of whom?"

"Of Willie MacDougald — the little fellow that came ashore to-day?"

"Did he not return to the brig?"

"No."

The man stepped forward.

"No," I repeated, "I have not seen him since."

"Then," he returned, "you are not likely ever to see him again."

"What do you mean?" I demanded. "What has happened? Where is he?"

Getting no answer, I looked around the room at the chairs and tables and pictures,— they had an air of comfort that made me miserably homesick,— and at the well-trimmed lamp from which the light fell on the Bible. Then I turned and went out into the darkness.

What had befallen that hardened little wretch? Where under the canopy of heaven could he be? I cared little enough for the mere fate of Willie MacDougald; but as a

new indication of the extremes to which Matterson and Gleazen would go, his disappearance came at a time that made it singularly ominous.

As I stood, thus pondering, on the rough porch from which I was about to step down and stride into the darkness, where I could make out the figures of negroes of all ages moving restlessly just beyond the light that shone from the windows, I received such a start as seldom has come to me. A hand touched my arm so quietly that for a moment I nearly had an illusion that that miserable little sinner, Willie MacDougald, had returned from the next world to haunt me in this one; a low voice said in my ear, "Stay here with us."

I turned. Just beside me stood the girl whom I had seen in the canoe.

"Stay here," she repeated. "They have gone."

I stammered and tried to speak, and for the first time in my life I found that my tongue was tied.

A step rustled in the grass just under the porch; something touched the floor beside my foot; then a huge black hand brushed gently over my shoe and up my leg, and a black, grotesque face, with rolling eyes and round, slightly parted lips, looked up at me, so close to my hand that unconsciously I snatched it away lest it be bitten.

Startled nearly out of my wits by this amazing apparition, I gave a leap backward and crashed against the wall, at which the absurd negro uttered a shrill whistle of surprise.

The girl tossed her head and stamped her foot, and spoke to the negro in a low voice, which yet was clear enough and sharp enough to send him without a sound into the darkness.

For a moment the lights from the window shone full upon her, and I saw that she was proud as well as comely,

and spirited as well as generous. The toss and the stamp showed it; the quick, precise voice confirmed it; and withal there was a twinkle of kindliness in her eyes that would have stormed the heart of a far more sophisticated youth than I. Such spirit is little, if at all, less fascinating to a young man than beauty; and when spirit and beauty go hand in hand, he must be a crabbed old bachelor indeed who can withstand the pair.

Whatever my theories of life, as I had long since revealed them to Arnold Lamont, I was no Stoic; and though at the time I was too excited to be fully aware of it, I thereupon fell, to the crown of my head, in love.

As the negro vanished, she turned on me with that same, queenly lift of her head.

"Well, sir, will you stay?"

"Why should I stay?" I managed at last to ask.

She looked me straight in the eye, "You're not of their kind," she replied. "Father himself thinks that."

For the moment I was confused, and thought only of Arnold and Gideon North.

"You and he are wrong," I stiffly responded. "I *am* their kind, and I am proud to be their kind."

"Oh," she said, "oh! I beg your pardon."

A hurt look appeared in her eyes and she stepped back and turned away.

All at once I remembered that she had never seen Arnold and Gideon North; that she had not meant them at all; that she had meant Gleazen and Matterson. It was at the tip of my tongue to cry out to her, to call her back, to tell her the whole truth about our party on board the brig Adventure. I had drawn the very breath to speak, when Gideon North's voice summoned me from the darkness:

"Joe, Joe Woods! Where are you?"

"Here I am," I cried. "I am coming." Then, when I turned to speak to the girl, I saw that she had gone.

I stepped off the porch, tripped, stumbled to my knees, got up again, and strode so recklessly down through the dark to the river that, before I knew I had reached it, I was ankle-deep in water.

"Well, my man," cried Gideon North, "you seem to be in a hurry now, though you were long enough starting."

Without a word, I got into the boat and took off my shoes and poured out the water. It irritated me to see Arnold looking at me keenly and yet with gentle amusement. I had come to have no small respect for Arnold's unusual insight.

All the way back to the brig my head was in such a whirl that, for the first time in my waking moments since we left Cuba, I completely forgot the one fundamental object for which we three were working, to save as far as possible poor Seth Upham and his property from the hands of Cornelius Gleazen and his fellows. Instead I kept hearing the voice that had said, "You're not of their kind," kept seeing the face that I had seen there in the dim light — not at all clearly, yet clearly enough to see that it had a sweet dignity and that it was good to look upon.

The boat bumping against the brig woke me from my dreams. Scrambling aboard, I left my shoes in the galley to dry by the stove and ran aft in my stocking feet, and down below. In my eagerness to get dry shoes and stockings I quite outstripped the others, who were loitering in the gangway.

It was with no thought or intention of surprising the four men in the cabin that I burst in upon them on my way to my own stateroom. They had pushed cards and chips to one side of the table and had gathered closely round it. In the centre, where their four heads almost met,

was a handful of rough stones, which for all I knew might have been quartz.

That I had done anything to anger them, when I came down so unceremoniously, I was entirely unaware; but O'Hara, the newcomer, sweeping the stones together with a curse, covered them with his hands; Gleazen faced about and angrily stared at my stockinged feet; and Matterson, rising in fury, snarled through his teeth, "You sniveling, sneaking, prying son of a skulking sea-cook, I swear I'll have your heart's blood!"

Before I could turn, the man dived at me straight across the table. I raised my hands to fend him off, with the intention of shoving his head into the floor and planting my feet on the back of his neck; stepped back, tripped and fell. I saw Gleazen lift a chair to bring it down on my head — even then I thought of the irony of my being his "lieutenant"! I saw that wild Irishman, Bud O'Hara, laughing like a fiend at my plight. Then I flung up my feet to receive the blow, and seizing the legs of the chair, twisted it over between Matterson and myself, and got up on my knees. Then in came the others.

Spinning on his heel, Matterson, his jaw out-thrust, stood squarely in the path of Gideon North.

"You are hasty," I said. "I came in to get my shoes."

"Ah," said Bud O'Hara, in biting sarcasm, "and then 't was in the eyes of us that you was looking for trouble."

"It was, indeed," I retorted.

"And perhaps you did n't see what was going on," he persisted.

"I did not," I replied, not knowing what he meant.

They looked doubtfully at one another, and then at me, and presently Gleazen said, "Then we're sorry we used you rough, Joe."

Meanwhile, I now perceived, the handful of stones had disappeared.

All this time my uncle had sat in his chair, looking like a man in a nightmare, and had raised neither hand nor voice to help me. In a way, so amazing was his silence, it seemed almost as if he himself had struck me. I could scarcely believe it of him. When I looked at him in mingled wonder and grief, his eyes fell and he slightly moistened his lips.

CHAPTER XVIII

A WARNING DEFIED

The brig Adventure, two thousand miles from home, lay now in the strong, silent current of a great tropical river, which seemed to me to have an almost human quality. In its depth and strength and silence, it was like a determined, taciturn man. I felt keenly its subtle fascination; I delighted to picture in my mind its course all the way from the mysterious hills far inland, of which Pedro and Gleazen and Matterson told stories filled with trade and slaves and stirring incidents, down to the low, marshy shore, which had already cast a spell upon me.

For months since that fearful night when we five fled from Topham, Arnold and Gideon North and I had been holding ourselves ready at every moment to stand up against Gleazen and Matterson and meet them man to man in behalf of my poor, deluded uncle, who now would go slinking about the deck, now would make a pitiful show of his old pompous, dictatorial manner. But when I burst in upon them in the cabin, there had been that in their manner, even after their anger spent itself, which told me more plainly than harshest words that the time for action had come very near.

To Arnold, when we were alone in our stateroom, I said, "What would you think, were I to load my pistols afresh?"

He looked curiously at me.

"You think," said he, slowly, "that there is already need?"

"I do," I replied.

I felt a new confidence in myself and in my own judg-

ment. I regarded our situation calmly and with growing assurance. Although I did not then realize it, I know now that I was crossing the threshold between youth and manhood.

He gravely nodded.

"It is a wise precaution," he said at last, "although I prophesy that they will use us further before the time comes when we must fight for our lives."

So we both slept that night with new charges in the pistols by our heads, and Arnold, very likely, as well as I, dreamed of the utterly reckless, lawless men with whom we were associated. I question, though, if Arnold thought as much as I of the stern man in the cane house on the river-bank, or if he thought at all of the girl whose white face and dark eyes I could not forget.

For another day we continued to lie in the river; but the brig, alow and aloft, bustled with various activities. We sorted out firearms on the cabin floor, and charts and maps on the cabin table, and on the spar-deck we piled a large store of provisions. And in the afternoon Matterson took Captain North in the quarter boat down to the mouth of the river, and there taught him the bearings of the channel.

Side by side Arnold and I watched all that went forward, here lending a hand at whatever task came our way, there noting keenly how the stores were arranged.

"Well, sir," said Arnold, quietly, when Captain North for a moment stood beside us in preoccupied silence, "are we about to load a cargo of Africans?"

"I assure you I'd like to know that," the captain replied, with one of his quick glances.

Uncle Seth gave me an occasional curt word or sentence — he was in one of his arrogant moods; Matterson talked to me vaguely and at length of great times ahead; O'Hara

watched me with hostile and suspicious glances. And still Arnold and I, whenever occasion offered, put our heads together and made what we could of the various preparations. Our surmises, time showed, were not far wrong.

And all this while I had watched the clearing ashore and had seen neither the missionary nor any other white man.

When, in the evening, all hands were ordered aft, we on the quarter deck looked down and saw the men standing expectantly to hear whatever was to be said. A thousand rumors had spread throughout the vessel, and of what was really afoot they knew less, even, than Arnold and I. There was Abe Guptil with his kindly face upturned, Pedro with his monkey on his shoulder and what seemed to me a devilish gleam in his eye, and all the rest. As they gathered close under us, the light from the lanterns slung in the rigging revealed every one of them to my curious gaze.

"Men," said Captain North, quietly, "Mr. Gleazen has asked me to call you together. There are certain things that he wishes to tell you."

As the grizzled old mariner stepped back, Cornelius Gleazen advanced.

His beaver, donned for the occasion, was tilted over his eye as of old; his diamonds flashed from finger and throat; he puffed great clouds of smoke from his ever-present cigar.

"Lads," he cried in that voice which seemed always so fine and hearty and honest, "lads, that there's no ordinary purpose in this voyage, all of you, I make no doubt, have heard. Well, lads, you're right about that. It is no ordinary purpose that has brought us all the way from Boston. You've done good work for us so far, and if you keep up the good work until the end of the voyage has brought us home again to New England, we ain't going to forget you, lads. No, sir! Not me and Mr. Matterson and

Mr. O'Hara — oh, yes, and Mr. Upham! We ain't going to forget you."

Reflectively he knocked the ash from his cigar. Leaning over the rail, he said, as if taking all the men into his confidence, "All you've got to do now, lads, is stand by. Captain North will take the brig to sea for one week. There's a reason for that, lads, a good reason. At the end of the week he will bring the brig up off the mouth of the river, and some fine morning you'll wake up and find us back again.

"Meanwhile, lads, we're going to make up a little party to go exploring. Me and Mr. Matterson, Mr. O'Hara, Mr. Upham, and Pedro and Sanchez are going. And we are going to take John Laughlin with us, too. It's going to be a hard trip, lads, and you'll none of you be sorry to miss it. Now, then, lay to and load this gear into the boat. Be faithful to your work, and you'll be glad when you see what we're going to do for you."

As he turned away, proud of his eloquence, there was a low rumble of voices.

I looked first at Gleazen and Matterson and O'Hara; then I looked at poor Seth Upham, once as proud and arrogant as any of them. Remembering how in little ways he had been kind to me,— how, since my mother died, his dry, hard affection had gone out to me, as if in spite of him,— I pitied the man from the bottom of my heart. Surely, I thought, he must not go alone into the wilds of Africa with such men as were to make up Gleazen's party.

No one had spoken, except in undertones, since Gleazen; some one, I thought, must speak promptly and firmly.

For a moment, as I looked at the hard faces of the men whom I must oppose, my courage forsook me utterly; then the new confidence that had been growing within me once more gave me command of myself. Whatever should come

of my effort, I was determined that my mother's brother should have at least one honest man beside him. To reason out all this had taken me the merest fraction of the time that it takes to read it.

Stepping suddenly forward, I said in a voice so decided that it surprised me as much as anyone, if not more: —

"Mr. Gleazen, I desire to go with you."

"And I," said Arnold Lamont.

"You young pup," Gleazen bellowed, "who are you to desire this or desire that?"

"Then," said I, "I *will* go with you."

"You will not," he retorted.

I saw out of the corner of my eye that Matterson and O'Hara were looking at me keenly, but I never let my gaze veer from Gleazen's.

"Mr. Gleazen," I said boldly, "Arnold Lamont, Abe Guptil, and I are going to take the places of Pedro, Sanchez, and John Laughlin."

He swore a round oath and stepped toward me with his fists clenched, while the men below us fairly held their breath. In a fist fight the man could have pounded me to a pulp, for he was half as heavy again as I; but at the thought of poor Uncle Seth with all his property tied up in that mad venture, with his happiness and his very life in the absolute power of that band of godless reprobates, something stronger than myself rose up within me. At that moment I verily believe I could have faced the fires of hell without flinching. Thinking of the old days when Uncle Seth and my mother and I had been so happy together and of how kind he had been to me in his own testy, abrupt, reserved way, I stepped out and shook my fist in Gleazen's face.

Before he could say another word, I cried, "So help me, unless we three go with you and those three stay, we'll

keep Seth Upham back and sail away in the Adventure and leave you here forever."

Never before could I have spoken thus lightly of what my uncle should, or should not, do. The thought made me feel even more keenly how helpless the poor man had become, and confirmed me in my purpose.

It was on the tip of my tongue to add that Gideon North was to come, too, but I thought of how essential it was that someone whom we — Arnold and I — could trust should stand guard upon the brig, and said nothing more, which probably was better, for my words seemed to have struck home.

When I threatened to sail away with the Adventure, Gleazen glared at me hard and murmured, with a respect and admiration in his voice that surprised me, "You young cock, I did n't think you had it in you."

Throwing overboard the butt of his cigar, which made a bright arc in its flight through the darkness and fell into the water with a smart hiss, he smiled to himself.

Matterson whispered to O'Hara, who touched Gleazen's arm. I thought I heard him say, "Too honest to make trouble," as they drew apart and conferred together, glancing now and then at my uncle; then Gleazen nodded and said, "Very well, Joe"; and I knew that for once I had come off victorious.

At least, I thought, we are strong enough to stand up for our rights and Uncle Seth's.

The men quietly turned away and went forward, a little disappointed that the trouble had blown past and the episode had come to naught. But it had added one more issue to be fought out between Cornelius Gleazen and myself; and though it was over, it was neither forgotten nor forgiven.

I had gone into the waist, where I was watching the

arms and provisions that the men were loading into the boat we were to take, when I heard a voice at my ear, "I guess — ha-ha! — you come back with plenty nigger, hey?"

It was Pedro with his monkey riding on his shoulder. The beast leered at me and clicked its teeth.

"No," I replied, "of that I am sure. We are not going after any such cargo as that."

"I wonder," he responded. "I t'ink, hey, queer way to get nigger — no barracoon — go in a boat. But dah plenty nigger food below. Plenty lumber. Plenty chain'. What you get if not nigger?"

I said nothing.

"Maybe so — maybe not," Pedro muttered. His earrings tinkled as he shook his head and moved away.

I was surprised to observe that for the moment all work had stopped.

Seeing that O'Hara was pointing into the swamp, I stepped over beside him to ascertain what had caught his attention, but found the darkness impenetrable.

"I'm telling ye, some one's there," O'Hara muttered with an oath.

I saw that Gleazen and Matterson were on the other side of him.

Now the men were whispering.

"Sh!"

"See there — there — there it goes!"

"What — Oh! There it is!"

I myself saw that something vague and shadowy was moving indistinctly toward us down one of the long lanes of water.

Suddenly out of the swamp came a piercing wail. It was so utterly unhuman that to every one of us it brought, I believe, a nameless terror. Certainly I can answer for

myself. It was as if some creature from another world had suddenly found a voice and were crying out to us. Then the wail was repeated, and then, as if revealed by some preparation of phosphorus, I indistinctly saw, in the dark of the swamp, an uncouth face, black as midnight, on which were painted white rings and patches.

For the third time the cry came out to us; then a voice shrieked in a queer, wailing minor:—

"White man, I come 'peak. Long time past white man go up water. Him t'ief from king spirit. Him go Dead Land.

"White man, I come 'peak. We no sell slave. White man go him country so him not go Dead Land. White man, I go."

The dim, mysterious face drew away little by little and disappeared. A single soft splash came from the great marsh, then a yell so wild and weird that to this very day the memory of it sometimes sets me to shivering, as if I myself were only a heathen savage and not a white man and a Christian.

Three times we heard the wild yell; then far off in the fastnesses of the swamp, we heard an unholy chanting. It was high and shrill and piercing, and it brought to us across the dark water suggestions of a thousand terrors.

I felt Bud O'Hara's hand on mine, and it was as cold as death.

CHAPTER XIX

BURNED BRIDGES

"By Heaven!" O'Hara gasped, "the voice has spoke."

"Aye, so it has," said Gleazen slowly.

"Neil, Molly, sure and we'd best put out to sea. This is no time for us, surely. A month from now, say, we could slip in by night with a boat — "

"O'Hara," said Matterson's light, almost silvery voice, "have *you* turned coward?"

"No, not that, Molly! 'T is not I am scairt of any man that walks the green earth, Molly, but spirits is different."

"Spirits!" Matterson was softly laughing. "I did n't think, O'Hara, *you'd* be one to turn black."

"Laugh, curse you!" O'Hara cried hotly. "If 't was you had seen a glimmer of the things I've seen with my own two eyes; if 't was you had seen a man die because he went against taboo; if 't was you had seen a witch doctor bring the yammering spirit back unwilling to a cold body; if 't was you had seen a man three weeks dead get up and dance; if 't was you had seen a strong man fall down without the breath of life in him at all, and all for nothing else but a spell was on him, maybe then you'd believe me. I swear by the blessed saints in heaven, it's throwing our lives away to go up river now; and all I've got to say for Bull is, God help him!"

The others were looking at O'Hara curiously. The lantern light on their faces brought out every scar and wrinkle and showed that strong passions were contending within each of them.

"It ain't spirits that worries me," said Gleazen, at last,

"and it ain't niggers. It's men." He now seemed quite to shake off the spell of the strange voice. "What say, Seth?" He turned to my uncle.

To my surprise, Seth Upham rose manfully to the occasion. "Spirits?" he cried. "Nonsense!"

O'Hara uneasily shifted his feet. "Ah, say what you like, men," he very earnestly replied, "say what you like against spirits and greegrees and jujus and all the rest. I'll never be one to say there's nothing in them, nor would you, if you'd seen all that I have seen. And I'll be telling you this, men: that voice we heard then was speaking the thoughts of ten thousand fighting niggers up and down this river."

"Pfaw!" said Gleazen, stretching his arms. "Niggers won't fight."

"That from you, Neil!"

I never learned just what lay behind O'Hara's simple thrust, but there was no doubt that it struck a weak link in Gleazen's armor, for he flushed so deeply that we could see it by lantern light. "Well, now," said he, with a conciliatory inflection, "of course I meant it in moderation."

All this time Arnold and Gideon North and I stood by and looked and listened.

Now, with a glance at us, Matterson said shortly, "Come, come! Enough of that. All hands lay to and load the boat."

"I've warned ye," said O'Hara.

"At midnight," said Matterson, "*we'll* go *up* the river, and Gideon North'll take the brig *down* the river. Come morning there'll be no stick nor timber of us here. They'll bother no more about us then."

"Ye'll never fool 'em," said O'Hara.

Matterson turned his back on him, and the work went forward, and for an hour there was only the low murmur

of voices. The boat, now ready for the journey, rode at the end of her painter, where the current made long ripples, which converged at her bow. Here and there, lights shone in the clearing and set my imagination and my memory hard at work, but elsewhere the impenetrable blackness of a cloudy night blanketed the whole world. And meanwhile the others were holding council in the cabin.

"I think," Arnold Lamont said, "that Matterson and Gleazen underestimate the ingenuity and resources of that black yelling devil."

"So they do," said Abe Guptil. "So they do, and I'd be glad enough to be back home, I tell you."

What would I not have given to be sleeping once more in Abe's low-studded house beside our wholesome northern sea!

Now the others came from the cabin. They walked eagerly. Their very whispers were full of excitement. Even Uncle Seth seemed to have got from somewhere a new confidence and a new hope, so smartly did he step about and so sharply did he speak; and the faint odor of brandy that came with them explained much.

We climbed down into the loaded boat and settled ourselves on the thwarts, where Abe Guptil and I took oars.

"It's turn and turn about at the rowing," Matterson announced. "We've a long way to go and a current dead against us."

I saw Gideon North looking down at us anxiously, and waved my hand. Then someone cast off, and we pulled out into midstream and up above the brig, where we held our place and watched and waited.

Soon we heard orders on board the brig. Sails fell from the gaskets and shook free. The men began to heave at the windlass. The brig first came up to the anchors, then, with anchors aweigh, she half turned in the current.

Now orders followed in quick succession. We could hear them rigging the fish tackle and catching the hooks on the flukes of the anchors. Blocks rattled, braces creaked, the yards swung from side to side according to the word of command. The sails filled with the light breeze, and coming slowly about, the Adventure gathered steerage-way and went down the river as if she were some gigantic water bird lazily swimming between the mangroves. We watched her go and knew that we seven were now irrevocably left to fend for ourselves.

When Gleazen whispered to us to give way, we bent to the oars with a will. For better or for worse, we had embarked on the final stage of our great quest.

The lights in the clearing fell astern. The tall trees seemed to close in above us. Alone in the wilderness, we turned the bow of our boat toward the heart of Africa.

That we had set forth in complete secrecy on our voyage up river we were absolutely confident. What eyes were keen enough to tell at a distance that the brig had left a boat behind her when she sailed?

Gleazen now laughed derisively at O'Hara. "You'd have had us sail away, would you? And wait a month? Or a year, maybe, or maybe two. Ha, ha!"

"Don't you laugh at me, Neil," O'Hara replied. "We're not yet out o' the woods."

At the man's solemn manner Gleazen laughed again, louder than before.

As if to reprove his rashness, as if to bear out every word O'Hara had said, at that very moment the uncanny yell we had heard before rose the second time, far off in the swamp. Three times we heard the yell, then we heard the voice, faint and far away, "White man, I come 'peak. White man boat him sink. White man him go Dead Land."

Three times more the wordless wailing yell drifted to us

out of the darkness; then we heard a great multitude of men wildly and savagely laughing.

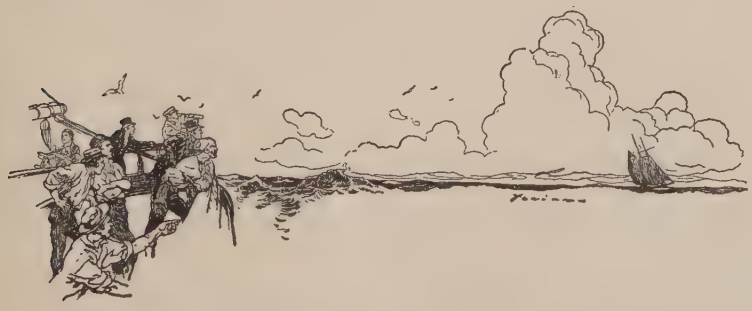
Never again did Cornelius Gleazen scoff at O'Hara. His face now, I verily believe, was grayer than O'Hara's. He turned about and stared downstream as if he could see beyond the black wall of mangroves.

"Now what'll we do?" he gasped, with a choking, profane ejaculation. "Did you hear that?"

Had we heard it! There was not one of us whom it had not chilled to the heart. Our own smallness under those vast trees, our few resources,— we had only the goods that were piled in the boat,— our unfathomable loneliness, combined to make us feel utterly without help or strength. But it was now too late to return. So we bent to our oars and rowed on, and on, and on, against the current of the great river.

The only help that remained to us lay in our own right hands and in the mercy of divine Providence. Would Providence, I wondered, help such men as Gleazen and Matterson and O'Hara?

Nor was that the only doubt that beset us. Although the three accepted us, and in actual fact trusted us, they made no attempt to conceal their enmity; and I very well knew that, besides danger from without our little band, Arnold, Abe, and I must guard against treachery from within it.



V

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL

CHAPTER XX

UP STREAM

Pulling hard at our oars, we rowed up the river, along the shore and so near it that the shadows of the mangroves almost concealed us. My breath came in quick, hard gasps; the sweat started from my body and dripped down my face; every muscle ached from violent exertion. As I dizzily reeled, I saw, as if it were carved out of wood or stone, Gleazen's staring, motionless face thrust forth squarely in front of my own. Then I flopped forward and Gleazen himself caught the oar from my hands.

We had taken the gig for our expedition, because it was light and fast; but although we carried four oars, we used only two of them, mainly because it had been Gleazen's whim to load our baggage between the after thwarts, so that while two men rowed for comparatively short spells, the others could take their ease in bow and stern. And indeed, had our plan to set forth with utmost secrecy not gone awry, it would have been a comfortable enough arrangement.

I had not dreamed that Gleazen was so strong; he set a stroke that no ordinary oarsman could maintain; and when Abe Guptil lost time and reeled on the thwart, Matterson slipped into his place and fairly lifted the boat on the water.

Of course we could not keep up such a pace for long; but the hard work in a way relieved our anxiety, as hard work does when one is troubled; and after each of us, including Uncle Seth, had taken his turn at the oars until he was dog-tired, we settled down to a saner, steadier stroke, and

thus began in earnest the long journey that was to be the last stage of our pilgrimage.

By watching the gray lane overhead, where the arching trees failed to meet above the river, since it was literally too dark to see the water, we were able to mark out our course; and skirting the tangled and interwoven roots as nearly as we could, we doggedly fought our way against the current to the monotonous rhythm of swinging oars, loud breathing, and hoarse grunts. The constant whisper of the river so lulled me, weary as I was, that by and by my head drooped, and the next thing that I knew was a hand on my shoulder and a voice at my ear calling me to take my turn at rowing.

I woke slowly and saw that Abe Guptil like me was rubbing his eyes, and that my uncle and Arnold Lamont were lying fast asleep on the bottom of the boat.

"Come, come," said Gleazen, quietly. "See, now! Mr. Matterson and I've brought us well on our way. Come, get up and row till it is fairly light. Wake us then, and we'll haul the boat up and lie in hiding for the day."

Matterson handed over his oar without a word, and Abe and I fell to our task.

As the dawn grew and widened in the east, we could see how thickly the roots of the mangroves intertwined. From the ends of the limbs small "hangers," like ropes, grew down and took root in the ground. The trees, thus braced and standing from six to twelve feet in air on their network of tangled, interwoven roots, were the oddest I had ever seen.

After a time we came to a large stretch of bush, where innumerable small palms were crowded together so thickly that among them an object would have been completely invisible, even in broad day, at a distance of six feet. In the midst of the bush a great tree grew, and in the top of

it a band of monkeys was swinging and racing and chattering in the pale light. In an undertone I spoke to Abe about the monkeys, and he, too, still rowing, turned his head to watch them. Then, at the very moment when we were intent on their antics, a new mood seemed to come over them.

I cannot well describe the change, because at first it was so subtle that I felt it, as much as saw it, and I was inclined to doubt if Abe would notice it at all. Yet as I watched the little creatures, which had now ceased their chattering, I suddenly realized that the boat was beginning to drift with the current. By common impulse, attracted by the very same thing, both Abe and I had stopped rowing.

As I leaned forward and again swung out my oar, Abe touched my arm. "Hush!" he whispered. "Wait! Listen!"

Pausing with arms outstretched, ready to throw all my strength into the catch, I listened and heard a faint *crack*, as of a broken stick, under the tree in which a moment since the monkeys had been hard at play.

We exchanged glances.

I now realized that daylight, coming with the swiftness that is characteristic of it in the tropics, had taken us unawares. The sun had risen and found Abe and me so intent on a band of monkeys playing in a tree, that we had neglected to wake the others.

I put out my hand and leaned over the bags to touch Gleazen, the nearest of the sleepers, when Abe again pressed my arm. Turning, I saw that his finger was at his lips. Although his gesture puzzled me, I obeyed it, and we remained silent for a minute or two while the current carried the boat farther and farther downstream.

Every foot that we drifted back meant labor lost, and

I was so sorely tempted to put an end to our silence that I was on the point of speaking out, when, distinctly, unmistakably, we heard another crackle in the bush.

"Pull," Abe whispered, "pull, Joe, as hard as you can."

I leaned back against my oar, heard the water gurgle from under it, saw bubbles go floating down past the stern, and knew that by one stroke we had stopped our drifting. With a second swing of the long blades, we sent the boat once more up against the current. Now we got back into the old rhythm and went on past the dense palms, until we again came to the tangled roots of mangroves.

Laying hold of one of the roots, Abe whispered, "Wake 'em, Joe!"

They woke testily, and with no thanks to us, even though it was by their orders that we called them.

In reply to their questions we told them the whole story, from the strange hush that came over the monkeys to the second crackling among the palms; but they appeared not to take our apprehensions seriously.

"Belike it was a snake," said O'Hara, "a big feller. Them big fellers will scare a monkey into fits."

"Or some kind of an animal," said Gleazen, curtly. "Did n't I say we was to be called at daylight? When I say a thing I mean it." He impatiently turned from us to his intimates. "How about it, Bud; shall we haul up here for the day?"

"Belike it was only a snake," O'Hara replied, "but 't was near, despite of that. Push on, I say."

There was something in the expression of his face as he stared downstream that made me even more uneasy than before.

"Not so! The niggers will see us in the open and end us there and then," interposed Matterson. "Moreover, un-

less the place has changed with the times, there's a town a scant three miles ahead."

"Belike 't was only a serpent," O'Hara doggedly repeated, "but 't is no place for us here. Let us fare on just half a mile up stream t'other side the river, in the mouth of the little creek that makes in there, and, me lads, let us get there quickly."

As we once more began to row, I was confident that O'Hara's talk of a great serpent was poppy-cock for us and for Uncle Seth, and that in any case neither Gleazen nor Matterson nor O'Hara cared a straw about a serpent half a mile away. At the time I would have given much to know just what shrewd guess they had made at the cause of that strange crackling; but they dismissed the subject absolutely, which probably was as well for all concerned; and refusing to speak of it again, they urged Abe and me to our rowing until at their direction we bore across the current and slipped through the trailing branches of the trees, and through the thick bushes and dangling vines, into the well-hidden mouth of a little creek.

By then the sun was shining hotly and I was glad enough to lean on my oar and get my breath.

All that day we lay in the thick vegetation of the creek, which to a certain extent shielded us from the sun, although the warm, damp air became almost unendurable. Much of the time we slept, but always one or another of us was posted as a guard, and at high noon an alarm called us to our weapons.

O'Hara, who happened to be standing watch, woke us without a sound, one after another, by touching us with his hand.

For a while we saw only the great trees, the sluggish creek, the slow river, and the interwoven vines; then we

heard voices, and into our sight there swept a long canoe manned by naked negroes, who swung their paddles strongly and went racing past us down the river.

How, I wondered, had O'Hara known that they were coming? Human ears could not have heard their voices as far away as they must have been when he woke us.

It was evident, when the blacks had gone, that Matterson and O'Hara had made sense of their mumbled gutteral speech.

"I warned ye," O'Hara whispered, glaring at Matterson and Gleazen. "Had we waited, now, say only a month, they'd not be scouring the river in search of us."

"Pfaw! Niggers with bows and arrows," Gleazen scornfully muttered.

"Yes, niggers with bows and arrows," O'Hara returned. "But I'd no sooner die by an arrow than by a musket-ball."

"Die? Who's talking o' dying?" Gleazen whispered. And calmly laying himself down again, he once more closed his eyes.

"Sure, and I'd not be one to talk o' dying," O'Hara murmured, as he resumed his guard with a musket across his knees, "was not the curse o' rash companions upon me."

Matterson, holding aloof from their controversy, solemnly looked from one of the two to the other. There was that in his eyes which I did not like to see — not fear, certainly, but a look of understanding, which convinced me that O'Hara had the right of it.

And now Seth Upham, who had followed all this so sleepily that he did not more than half understand the significance of what had occurred, as of old spoke up sharply, even pompously. In that confused state between sleeping and waking his mind seemed to have gone back to some

mood of months before. "That's all nonsense, O'Hara; we're safe enough. Gleazen's right." His words fairly shattered the silence of the marshy woods.

He was the first of us to speak in an ordinarily loud voice, and almost before he had finished his sentence a bird about as big as a crow and as black as jet except for its breast and neck, which were snowy white, rose from a tree above us, and with a cry that to me sounded for all the world like a crow cawing, circled high in the air.

Hot with anger, O'Hara struck Seth Upham on the mouth with his open hand.

That it had been arrant folly for my uncle thus to speak aloud, I knew as well as any other; and the bird circling above us and crying out in its slow flight was liable to draw upon us an attack from heaven only knew what source and quarter. But that O'Hara or any other should openly strike the man who in his own way had been so kind to me was something that I could not endure, and my own temper flamed up as hotly as ever did O'Hara's.

Quick as a flash I caught his wrist, even before he had withdrawn his hand, and jerked him from the thwart to his knees. With a devilish gleam in his eye, he threw off my grip and clubbed his musket.

Before I could draw my pistol he would have brained me, had not Matterson, with no desire whatever to save me from such a fate, but apparently only eager to have a hand in the affair, seized me from behind, lifted me bodily from my seat, and plunged me down out of sight into the creek.

Of what followed, I know only by hearsay, for I was too much occupied with saving myself from drowning to observe events in the boat. But the creek was comparatively shallow, and getting my feet firmly planted on bottom, I pushed up my head and breathed deeply.

Meanwhile it seems that Arnold Lamont quietly thrust his knife a quarter of an inch through the skin between two of Matterson's ribs, thus effectually distracting his attention, while Abe Guptil deftly caught O'Hara's clubbed musket in his hands and wrenched it away.

As I hauled myself back into the boat, Gleazen sat up and stared, first at the others who, now that Matterson had knocked Arnold's knife to one side, were momentarily deadlocked, then at me dripping from my plunge, then at Seth Upham upon whose white face the marks of O'Hara's hand still showed red.

"Between you," he whispered angrily, "you *will* have half the niggers in Africa upon us."

"He talked," O'Hara muttered, pointing at Uncle Seth.

"You struck him," I retorted.

" 'T was a bird told me they was coming by. 'T will be that bird surely will tell them we are here."

Arnold and Abe and I glared angrily at O'Hara and Matterson and Gleazen, but by common consent we dropped the brief quarrel, and when, after an anxious time of waiting, the canoe had not reappeared, we again lay down to sleep.

Yet I saw that Uncle Seth's hand was trembling and that he was not so calm as he tried to appear; and I knew that, although we might go on with a semblance of tolerance, even of friendship, the rift in our little party had grown vastly wider.

Waking at nightfall, we made our evening meal of such cooked provisions as we had brought from the Adventure, and pushed through the screen of dense branches, and out on the strongly running, silent river. Again we bent to the oars and rowed interminably on against the stream and into the black darkness.

That night we passed a town with wattled houses and

thatched roofs rising in tall cones high on the riverbank, and a building that O'Hara said was a *barre* or courthouse. In the town, we saw against the sky, which the rising moon now lighted, a few orange trees and palms, and under it, close beside the bank of the river, we indistinctly made out a boat, which, Gleazen whispered, was very likely loaded with camwood and ivory. We passed it in the shadow of the opposite shore, rowing softly because we were afraid that someone might be sleeping on the cargo to guard it, and went by and up the river till the pointed roofs of the houses were miles astern.

O'Hara and Gleazen and Matterson talked together, and part of their talk was bickering among themselves, and part was of the man Bull who, all alone in the wilderness, was waiting for us somewhere in the jungle, and part was in Spanish, which I could not understand. But when they talked in Spanish, they looked keenly at Arnold and Abe and me, and I found comfort then in thinking that, although Arnold and I now had no chance to exchange confidences, he was hearing and remembering every word of their conversation. And all the time that I watched them, I was thinking of the girl at the mission.

Remembering my talk with Arnold long ago, when I had expressed so poor an opinion of all womankind, I felt at once a little amused at myself and a little sheepish. Who would have thought that, at almost my first sight of the despised continent of Africa, I should see a girl whose face I could not forget? That when she spoke to me for the first time, her low, firm voice would so fasten itself upon my memory, that I should hear it in my dreams both sleeping and waking?

Poor Uncle Seth! Never offering to take an oar, never exchanging a word with any of the rest of us, he sat with his elbows on his knees and his head bowed. Gleazen and

Matterson had dropped even their unkindly humorous pretense of deferring to him. In our little band of adventurers he who had once been so assertive, so brimful of importance, had become the merest nonentity.

All that night we went up the river, and all the next day we lay concealed among the mangroves; but about the following midnight we came to a place where the banks were higher and the current swifter. Here O'Hara stood up in the bow of the boat and studied the shore and ordered us now to row, now to rest. For all of two miles we advanced thus, and heartily tired of his orders we were, when he directed us to veer sharply to larboard and enter a small creek, along the banks of which tall water-grass grew right down to the channel.

There was barely room for the boat to pass along the stream between the forests of grass which grew in the water on the two sides; but as we advanced, the tall grass disappeared, and the stream itself became narrower and swifter, and the banks became higher. The country, we now saw, was heavily timbered, and we occasionally came to logs, which we had to pry out of the way before we could pass. One moment we would be in water up to our necks, another we would be poling the boat along with the oars, until at last we grounded on a bar over which only a runlet gurgled.

There was a suggestion of dawn in the east, which revealed above and beyond the wood a line of low, bare hills; but when I looked at the wood itself, through which we must find our way, my courage oozed out by every pore and left me wishing from the bottom of my heart that I were safe at sea with Gideon North.

Piling all our goods on the bank, we hid the boat in the bushes and made camp.

"Hard upon daylight, we'll be starting," said O'Hara,

hoarsely. "Sleep is it, you ask? Don't that give you your while of sleep? Be about it. By dark, we'll reach him surely; and if not, we'll be in the very shadow of the hill."

The man was all a-quiver with excitement. He jerked his shoulders and twitched his fingers and rolled his eyes. Matterson and Gleazen, too, were softly laughing as they stepped a little apart from the rest of us.

I looked at Arnold.

He stood with one hand raised. "What was that?" he asked in a low voice.

Very faintly,— very, very far away,— we heard just such a yell as we had heard that night when in defiance of the wizard's warning we left the Adventure.

Coming to our ears at the particular moment when we most firmly believed that by consummate craft we had so concealed our progress up the river as to escape every prying eye and deceive every hostile black, it both taunted us and threatened us. Three times we heard it, faintly, then silence, deep and ominous, ensued.

CHAPTER XXI

A GRIM SURPRISE

To sleep at that moment would have required more than human self-control. Forgetting every personal grudge, every cause of enmity, we huddled together, seven men alone in an alien wilderness, and waited,— listened,— waited. I, for one, more than half expected, and very deeply feared, to hear coming from the darkness that ghostly voice which had cried to us twice already, "White man, I come 'peak." But, except for the whisper of the wind and the ripple of the creek, there was no sound to be heard.

The wind gently stirred the leaves, and the creek sang as it flowed down over the gravel and away through the reeds. The moon cast its pale light upon us, and the remote stars twinkled in the heavens. The cries, after that second repetition, died away, and at that moment did not come back. But our night of adventure was not yet at an end.

O'Hara deliberately leveled his index finger at the bed of the stream above us. "Sure, now, and there do be someone there," he whispered. "Watch now! Watch me!"

Stepping forward, with a slow, tigerish motion, he slightly raised his voice. "Come you out!" he said distinctly. Then he spoke in a gibberish of which I could make no more sense than if it had been so much Spanish.

Before our very eyes, silently, there rose from the undergrowth a great negro with a spear.

Arnold Lamont gave a quick gasp and I saw steel flash in the moonlight as his hand moved. Gleazen swore;

Matterson started to his feet; Abe Guptil came suddenly to a crouching position. But O'Hara, after one sharply indrawn breath, uttered a name and whispered something in that same language, which I knew well I had never heard before, and the negro answered him in kind.

For a moment they talked rapidly; then O'Hara turned to his comrades and in a frightened undertone said, "The black devils know the worst."

"Well?" retorted Gleazen, angrily. "What of it?"

"This" — O'Hara's leveled finger indicated the negro — "is Kaw-tah-bah."

"Well?" Gleazen reiterated, still more angrily.

"The war has razed his village to the ground."

Matterson now stepped forward and looked closely into the negro's face. Gleazen followed him.

"He laid down eight slave money," said O'Hara. "It was no good. They knew he was our friend. His wives, his children, his old father, all are dead."

Now Matterson spoke in the same strange tongue, slowly and hesitantly, but so that the negro understood him and answered him.

"He says," O'Hara translated, "that Bull built the house on the king's grave, and they feared him, because he is a terrible man; and because they feared him they left him alone in his house and brought the war to his friend, Kaw-tah-bah. Kaw-tah-bah's people are slaves. His wives, his children, his old father, all are dead. But he did not betray the secret."

Again Matterson spoke and again the negro answered.

"He says," cried O'Hara, "that Bull is waiting there on the hill by the king's grave."

The negro suddenly uttered a low exclamation.

Standing as still as so many statues, we heard yet again that faint, unearthly wail far off in the night, a wail, as

before, twice repeated. The third cry had scarcely died away, when the negro, with a startled gasp, darted into the brush.

O'Hara raised his hand and called to him to come back; but, never turning his head, he disappeared like a frightened animal.

Again we were alone in the wilderness.

To me, now, all that formerly I had understood only in vague outline had become clear in every detail. I knew, of course, that, after their own ship was wrecked, our quartette of adventurers had sent Gleazen back to America, to get by hook or crook another vessel to serve their godless purposes; and I knew that they had implicated my deluded uncle in something more than ordinary slave trade. Their talk of the man who had stayed behind for a purpose still further convinced me that Arnold had been right; I remembered the rough stones on the table in the cabin the night when I took the four by surprise. But it was only common sense that, if our first guess were *all* their secret, they would have smuggled such a find down to the coast, and have taken their chance in embarking in the first vessel that came to port. There was more than that of which to be mindful, and I knew well enough what.

"I say, now, push forward this very minute," cried O'Hara. "Better travel a bad road by dark in safety than a good road by day that will land every mother's son of us in the place where there's no road back."

"The black devils are hard upon us," Gleazen cried. "Lay low, I say. Come afternoon we'll sneak along easy like."

"I stand with Bud O'Hara," said Matterson, slowly. "It'll not be so easy to hit us by moonlight as by sunlight."

"And once we're with Bull in the little fort that he'll

have made for us," Bud persisted, "we'll be safe surely."

"It is harder to travel by night," said Arnold. "But it is easier by night than by day to evade an enemy."

The others looked at him curiously, as if surprised by his temerity in speaking out; but, oddly, his seemed to be the deciding voice. Working with furious haste, we sorted our goods and made them up into six packs, which we shouldered according to our strength. But as we worked, we would stop and look furtively around; and at the slightest sound we would start and stare. Our determination to go through to the end of our adventure had not flagged when at last we gathered beside the thicket where we had concealed the boat; but we were seven silent men who left the boat, the creek, and the river behind us, and with O'Hara to guide us set off straight into the heart of Africa.

O'Hara's long sojourn on the continent, which had made him a "black man" in the sense that he had come to believe, or at least more than half believe, in the silly superstitions of the natives, had served him better by giving him an amazing knowledge of the country. That he was following a trail he had traveled many times before would have been evident to a less keenly interested observer than I. But though he had traveled it ever so many times, it was a mystery to me how he could follow it unerringly, by moonlight alone, through black tangles of forest growth so dense that scarcely a ray stole down on the deeply shadowed path.

Passing over some high hills, we came, sweaty and breathless, down into a rocky gorge, along which we hurried, now skirting patches of cotton and corn and yams, now making a long détour around a sleeping village, until we arrived at a wood in a valley where a deep stream rumbled. And all this time we had seen no sign whatever of any living creature other than ourselves.

It was already full daylight, and throwing off our burdens, we flung ourselves down and slept. Had our danger been even more urgent, I believe that we could not have kept awake, so exhausted were we; and indeed, we were in greater peril than we had supposed, for all that day, whenever we woke, we heard at no great distance from our place of concealment the thump of a pestle pounding rice.

Twelve hours of daylight would easily have brought us to our destination. But it was slow work traveling in the darkness, and we still had far to go. Pushing on again that night, we pressed through a country thickly wooded with tall trees, many of which elephants had broken down in order to feed on the tender upper branches.

As we passed them, I was thrilled to see with my own eyes the work of wild elephants in their native country, and should have liked to stop for a time; but there was no opportunity to loiter, and leaving the woods behind us, we came at daylight to a brook, which had cut a deep channel into dark slate rock and blue clay.

Here I conjectured that we should camp for another day, but not so: our three leaders were strangely excited.

"Sure," O'Hara cried, pointing at a low hill at a distance in the plain, "sure, gentlemen, and there's our port. Where's the man would cast anchor this side of it?"

O'Hara, Gleazen, and Matterson stood at one side, and Arnold, Abe, and I at the other, with my poor uncle in the middle. We had not concerted to divide thus. Instinctively and unconsciously we separated into hostile factions, with poor Seth Upham — neither fish, flesh, nor fowl, as they say — standing weakly between us. But even so, the enthusiasm of the three was contagious. Weary though we were, we strongly felt it. We had come so far, all of us, and had wondered so much and so often about our myste-

rious errand, that now, with the end in sight, not one of us, I believe, would have stopped.

Casting caution to the winds, we swung down into a wild country and across the broad plain, where, after some three hours of rough hard travel, we came to the foot of the hill. And in all this time, except the patches of tilled land that we had passed, the towns that we had avoided, the thumping of pestles and the occasional sounds of domestic animals, we had seen and heard no sign of human life. It is not strange that for the moment I forgot the threats that had caused us such anxiety. Stopping only to catch our breath and drink and dash over our faces water from a brook, we started up the hill.

O'Hara, ahead of us all, was like a mad man in his eagerness, and Matterson and Gleazen were not far behind him. Even Uncle Seth caught something of their frenzy and assumed an empty show of his old pompousness and sharp manner.

Up the hill we went, our three leaders first, then, in nervous haste, between the two parties literally as well as figuratively, my uncle, then Arnold and Abe and I, who were soon outdistanced, in that fierce scramble, by all but Uncle Seth.

"Do you know, Joe," Abe said in a low voice, as he gave me a hand up over a bit of a ledge, "I'd sooner be home on my little farm that Seth Upham sold from under me, with only my crops and fishing to look forward to, than here with all the gold in Africa to be got? I wonder, Joe, if I'll ever see my wife and the little boy again."

"Nonsense!" I cried, "of course you will."

"Do you think so? I'm not so sure."

As we stood for a moment on the summit of the ledge, I saw that we had chosen a rougher, more circuitous path than was necessary. The others had gone up a sort of

swale on our right, where tall, lush grass indicated that the ground was marshy. It irritated me that we should have scrambled over the rocks for nothing; my legs were a-tremble from our haste.

"Of course you will," I repeated testily. Then I saw something move. "See!" I cried. "There goes an animal of some kind."

While for a moment we waited in hope of seeing again whatever it was that had moved, I thought, oddly enough, of the girl at the mission; then my thoughts leaped back half round the world to little Topham, and returned by swift steps, through all our adventures, to the spot where we stood.

Now the others were bawling at us to come along after them, so Abe and I turned, not having seen distinctly whatever animal there may have been, and followed them up the hill.

"Here's the brook!" O'Hara cried, "the brook from the spring!"

He was running now, straight up through the tall grass beside the tiny trickle, and we were driving along at his heels as hard as we could go.

"Here's the clearing, and never a blade of grass is changed since I left it last! O Bull! Here we are! See, men, see! Yonder on the old grave is the house all wattled like a nigger hut! O Bull! Where are you? But it's fine inside, men, I'll warrant you. He was laying to build it good. He said he'd fix it up like a duke's mansion. O Bull! I say, Bull!"

There indeed was the house, on a low mound, which showed the marks of sacrilegious pick and shovel. The posts on which it stood were driven straight down into the hillock. But in reply to O'Hara's loud hail no answer came from that silent, apparently deserted dwelling.

O'Hara turned and, as if apologizing, said in a lower voice, but still loud enough for us to hear, "Sure, now, and he must be out somewhere."

Then he waited for us, and we gathered in a little group and looked at the wattled hut as if in apprehension, although of course there was no reason on earth why we should have been apprehensive.

"Well, gentlemen," said Arnold, very quietly, "why not go in?"

Not a man stirred.

O'Hara faced about with moodily clouded eyes. "Well, then," he gasped, "he *would* build it on the king's grave."

I am sure that my face, for one, told O'Hara that he only mystified me.

"Sure, and he was like others I've seen. More than once I warned him, but he did n't believe in nigger gods. He did n't believe in nigger gods, and he built the house on the king's grave! On the king's grave, mind you! He was that set and reckless."

"Gentlemen," said Arnold, again, very quietly, very precisely, "why not go in?"

All this time my uncle, as was his way except in those rare moments when he made a pitiful show of regaining his old peremptory manner, had been standing by in silence, looking from one to another of our company. But now he hesitantly spoke up.

"He has not been here for some time," he said.

Gleazen turned with a scornful grunt. "Much you know whether he has or not," he retorted.

"See!" My uncle pointed at the door. "Vines have grown across the top of it."

Gleazen softly swore, and Matterson said, "For once, Neil, he's right."

Why we had not noticed it before, I cannot say; prob-

ably we were too much excited. But we all saw it now, and Gleazen, staring at the dark shadow of the leaves on the door, stepped back a pace.

"By Heaven," he whispered, "I don't like to go in."

"Gentlemen," said Arnold, speaking for the third time, ever quietly and precisely, "I am not afraid to go in."

When he boldly went up to the house ahead of us, we, ashamed to hang back, reluctantly followed.

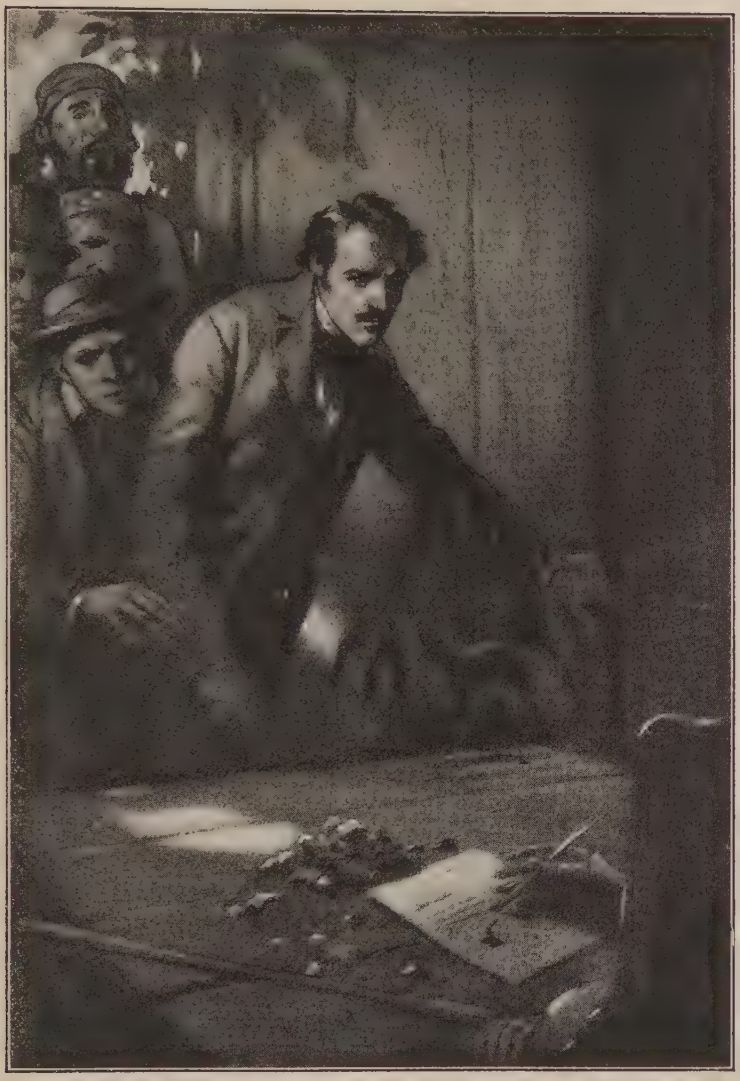
To this day I can see him in every detail as he laid his hand on the latch. His blue coat, which fitted so snugly his tall, straight figure, seemed to draw from the warm sunlight a brighter, more intense hue. His black hair and white, handsome face stood out in bold relief against the dark door, and the green leaves drooped round him and formed a living frame.

Setting his shoulders against the door, he straightened his body and heaved mightily and broke the rusty latch. The hinges creaked loudly, the vine tore away, the door opened, and in we walked, to see the most dreadful sight my eyes have ever beheld.

There in a chair by the table sat a stark skeleton dressed in good sound clothes. The arms and skull lay on the table itself beside a great heap of those rough quartz-like stones, — I knew now well enough what they were,— and the bony fingers still held a pen, which rested on a sheet of yellow foolscap where a great brown blot marked the end of the last word that the man they called Bull had ever written. Between the ribs of the skeleton, through the good coat and into the back of the chair in such a way that it held the body in a sitting posture, stuck a long spear.

Of the seven of us who stared in horror at that terrible object, Matterson was the first to utter a word. His voice was singularly meditative, detached.

"He never knew — see! — it took him unawares."



There in a chair by the table sat a stark ***skeleton*** *dressed in good sound clothes.*

O'Hara slowly went to the table, leaned over it, and looking incredulously at the paper, as if he could not believe his eyes, burst suddenly into a frenzy of grief and rage.

"Lads," he cried, "look there! My name was the last thing he wrote. O Bull, I warned ye, I warned ye — how many times I warned ye! And yet ye *would, would, would* build the house on the king's grave. O Bull!"

He drew the yellow paper out from under the fleshless fingers and held it up for all of us to see, and we read in a clear flowing hand the following inscription: —

My dear O'Hara: —

Not having heard from you this long time, I take my pen in hand to inform you that I am well and that despite your silly fears, no harm has come of building our house on the sightliest spot hereabouts. Martin Brown, the trader, from whom I bought the hinges and fittings will carry this letter to you and —

There it ended in a great blot. Whence had the spear come? Why had Martin Brown never called for the letter? Or had he called and gone away again?

What scenes that page of cheap, yellowed paper, from which the faded brown writing stared at us, had witnessed! It was indeed as if a dead man were speaking; and more than that, for the paper on which the man had been writing when he died had remained ever since under his very hands, undisturbed by all that had happened. How long must the man have been dead, I wondered. The stark white bones uncannily fascinated me. I saw that the feather had been stripped from the bare quill of the pen: could moths have done that? A knife could not have stripped it so cleanly.

Abe Guptil, who had been prowling about, now spoke, and we looked where he pointed and saw on the floor under a window the print of a single bare foot as clearly marked in mud as if it had been placed there yesterday.

"Hm! He saw that the job was done and went away again," said Gleazen, coolly.

I stared about the hut, from which apparently not a thing had been stolen, and thought that it was the more remarkable, because there were pans and knives in plain sight that would have been a fortune to an African black. The open ink-bottle, in which were a few brown crystals, the pen, which was cut from the quill of some African bird, and the faded letter, which was scarcely begun, told us that the spear, hurled through the open window, had pierced the man's body and snuffed out his life, without so much as a word of warning.

O'Hara unsteadily laid the letter down and stepped back. His face was still white. "It's words from the dead," he gasped.

"So it is," said Matterson, "but he's panned out a noble lot of stones."

As if Matterson's effeminate voice had again goaded him to fury, O'Hara burst out anew.

"You'd talk o' stones, would ye? Stones to me, that has lost the best friend surely ever man had? A man that would ha' laid down his very life for me; and now the niggers have got him and the ants have stripped his bones! O-o-oh! — " And throwing himself into a rough chair that the dead man himself had made, O'Hara sobbed like a little boy.

Matterson and Gleazen nodded to each other, as much as to say that it was too bad, but that no one had any call to take on to such an extent; and Gleazen with a shrug thrust a finger into that heap of stones, slowly, as if he

could not quite believe his senses,— little *he* cared for any man's life! — while those of us who until now had been so hypnotized by horror that we had not laid down our packs dropped them on the floor.

"Ants," O'Hara had said: I knew now why the bones were so clean and white; why the feather was stripped from the quill.

From the windows of the hut, which stood in a clearing at the very top of the hill, we could see for miles through occasional vistas in the tall timber below us. The edge of the clearing, on all sides except that by which we had approached it, had grown into a tangled net of vines, which had crept out into the open space to mingle with saplings and green shrubs. Half way down the hill, where we had passed it in our haste, I now saw, by the character of the vegetation, was the spring from which issued the brook whose course we had followed.

Uncle Seth, who had been striving to appear at ease since the first shock of seeing the single occupant of the house, came over beside me; and after a few remarks, which touched me because they were so obviously a pathetic effort to win back my friendship and affection, said in a louder voice, "Thank God, *we*, at least, are safe!"

The word to O'Hara was like spark to powder.

Flaring up again, he shrieked, "Safe — *you!* — and you thank God for it! You white-livered milk-sop of a country storekeeper, what is your cowardly life worth to yourself or to any one else? You safe!" He swore mightily. "You! I tell you, Upham, *there* —" he pointed at the skeleton by the table — "*there* was a *man!* You safe!"

Withered by the contempt in the fellow's voice, Uncle Seth stepped back from the window, turned round, and, as if puzzling what to say next, bent his head.

As he did so, a single arrow flew with a soft hiss in

through the window, passed exactly where his head had just that moment been, and with a hollow *thump* struck trembling into the opposite wall. There was not a sound outside, not the motion of a leaf, to show whence the arrow came. Only the arrow whispering through the air and trembling in the wall.

Uncle Seth, as yellow as old parchment, looked up with distended eyes at the still quivering missile.

"Safe, you say?" cried Gleazen with a hoarse laugh, still letting those little stones fall between his fingers. The man at times was a fiend for utter recklessness. "Aye, safe on the knees of Mumbo-Jumbo!"

I heard this, of course, but in a singularly absent way; for at that moment, when every man of us was staring at the arrow in the wall, I, strangely enough, was thinking of the girl at the mission.

CHAPTER XXII

SIEGE

MUCH as I hated and distrusted Cornelius Gleazen,— and in the months since I first saw him sitting on the tavern porch in Topham he had given me reason for both,— I continually wondered at his reckless nonchalance.

As coolly as if he were in our village store, with a codfish swinging above the table, instead of a skeleton leaning against it, and with a boy's dart trembling in a beam, instead of an arrow thrust half through the wall — with just such a grand gesture as he had used to overawe the good people of Topham, he stepped to the door and brushed his hair back from his forehead. The diamond still flashed on his finger; his bearing was as impressive as ever.

"Well, lads," he said,— and little as I liked him, his calmness was somehow reassuring,— "there *may* be a hundred of 'em out there, but again there *may* be only one. First of all, we'll need water. I'll fetch it."

From a peg on the wall he took down a bucket and, returning to the door, stepped out.

In the clearing, where the hot sun was shining, I could see no sign of life.

Pausing on the doorstone, Gleazen shrugged his great shoulders and stretched himself and moved his fingers so that the diamond in his ring flashed a score of colors. He was a handsome man in his big, rakehell way; and in spite of all I knew against him, I could but admire his bravado as he turned from us.

Boldly, deliberately, he stepped down into the grass,

while we crowded in the door and watched him. After all, it seemed that there was really nothing to be afraid of. The rest of us were startled and angry when O'Hara suddenly called out, "Come back, you blithering fool! Come back! You don't know them, Neil; I say, you don't know them. Come back, I say!"

With a scornful smile Gleazen turned again and airily waved his hand — I saw the diamond catch the sunlight as he did so. Then he gave a groan and dropped the bucket and cried out in pain and stumbled back over the threshold.

With muskets we sprang to guard door and window. But outside the hut there was no living thing to be seen. There was not even wind enough to move the leaves of the trees, which hung motionless in the sunlight.

It was as if we were in the midst of a nightmare from which shortly we should wake up. The whole ghastly incident seemed so utterly unreal! But when we looked at Gleazen, we knew that it was no mere nightmare. It was terrible reality. Blood was dripping from his left hand and running down on his shoe.

Through his hand, half on one side of it, half on the other, was thrust an arrow. A second arrow had passed just under the skin of his leg.

From the door I could see the bucket lying in the grass where he had dropped it; but except for a pair of parrots, which were flying from tree to tree, there still was no living thing in sight.

The vine-hung walls of the forest, which reached out long tendrils and straggling clumps of undergrowth as if to seize upon and consume the space of open ground, stood tall and green and silent. The deep grass waved in the faintest of breezes. Above a single big rock the hot air swayed and trembled.

Without even wincing, Gleazen drew the arrow from his hand and, refusing assistance, bound the wound himself.

Turning from the door, Arnold went to the table and touched an arm of the skeleton, which fell toward the body and collapsed inside the sleeve with a low rattle.

O'Hara raised his hand with an angry gesture.

"I mean no irreverence," said Arnold.

For a moment the two stood at gaze, then, letting his hand fall, O'Hara stepped over beside Arnold, and they lifted the bones, which for the most part fell together in the dead man's clothes, and laid them by the north wall.

"And what," asked Matterson, curiously, "are you two doing now?"

Without answering, Arnold coolly swept the stones on the table together between his hands into a more compact pile.

"Hands off, my boy," said Gleazen, quietly.

"Well?" Gleazen's words had brought a flush to Arnold's cheeks. He himself was nearly as old as Gleazen and was quick to resent the patronizing tone, and his very quietness was more threatening than the loudest bluster.

"Hands off," Gleazen repeated ; and raising his musket, he cocked it and tapped the muzzle on the opposite side of the table. "This says 'hands off,' too." He glanced around so that we could see that he meant us all. "Matterson, ain't there a sack somewhere hereabouts?" But for the blood on his shoe and the stained cloth round his hand, he gave no sign of having been wounded.

From under the table Matterson picked up a bag such as might have been used for salt, but which was made of strong canvas and was grimy from much handling.

"He was always a careful man," Gleazen remarked with a glance at the skeleton heaped up in the shadow of the wall. "I thought he would have provided a bag."

Gleazen and Matterson then, with pains not to miss a single one, picked up the stones by handfuls and let them rattle into the bag like shot.

"And now," said Gleazen, when the last one was in and the neck of the bag was tied, "once more: *hands off!*"

Laying the bag beside the skeleton, he took his stand in front of it, with Matterson and O'Hara on his right and left.

So far as the three of them were concerned, we might have been killed a dozen times over, had anyone seen fit to attack us. But Abe and I, all the time keeping one eye on the strange scene inside the cabin, had kept watch also for trouble from without, and all the time not a thing had stirred in the clearing.

"What," Matterson again asked, still watching Arnold curiously, "what are you going to do now?"

Tipping the table up on one side and wrenching off one of the boards that formed the top of it, Arnold placed it across a window, so that there was a slit at the bottom through which we could watch or shoot.

"Now, there's an idea!" Gleazen exclaimed. But he never stirred from in front of the skeleton and the bag.

"There are nails in the table," said Arnold.

Matterson smiled, and taking the board in one hand, tapped a nail against the table to start it, and with the thumb and forefinger of the other hand drew it out as easily as if it had been stuck in putty. "For a hammer," he said lightly, "use the butt of a musket."

"Look!" my uncle exclaimed: he was pointing at a good claw-hammer, which hung over the door.

The hut fell far short of the duke's mansion that its luckless builder had promised O'Hara, but it had a window in each of three walls, and the door in the fourth, so that, by cutting a hole through the door, we were able, after we

had barricaded the windows, to guard against surprise from any quarter without exposing ourselves to a chance shot; and as we had brought four muskets, we were able to give each sentry one well loaded.

The silence deepened. The air was fairly alive with suspicion. When Uncle Seth nervously moistened his lips, we all heard him; and when he flushed and shifted his feet, the creaking of a board seemed harsh and loud.

"Well," said Gleazen, slowly, "I'll stand in one watch and Matterson here will stand in the other. For the rest, suit yourselves."

Another long, uncomfortable silence fell upon us.

"Then," said Arnold, at last, "since no one else suggests an arrangement, I would suggest that Mr. Matterson, O'Hara, Mr. Upham, and I stand the first watch; that Mr. Gleazen, Joe Woods, and Abe Guptil stand second watch; and in order to put four men in each watch in turn, since we must have four to guard against surprise from any direction, I suggest that each man, turn and turn about, stands a double watch of eight hours. I myself will take the double watch first."

"That is good as far as it goes," Matterson interposed in his light voice. "But a single watch of two hours, with the double watch of four, is long enough. A man grows sleepy sooner with his eye at a knothole than if he is walking the deck."

Arnold nodded. "We agree to that," he replied.

"Lads," said Gleazen, quite unexpectedly, "let's have an end of hard looks and hard words. Come, Joe,— come, Arnold,— don't take sides against us and good Seth Upham. We're all in this fix together, and, by heaven! unless we stand together and come out together, not one of us 'll come out alive."

The man now seemed so frank, and in the face of our

common danger so genial, that, if I had not still felt the sting of the flattery by which he had deceived me so outrageously in the old days in Topham, I should have been convinced that he was sincere in every word he uttered. As it was, sincere or false, I knew that for the moment he was honest. However his attitude toward us might change when our troubles were past, for the time being we did share a common danger, and it was imperative that we stand together. But to speak of my poor uncle as if he were hand in glove with the three of them and on equal terms exasperated me.

Seth Upham's face was drawn and anxious. It was plain that his spirit was broken, and I believed, when I looked at him, that never again would he make a show of standing up to the man who had virtually robbed him of all he possessed.

"Sir," said Arnold Lamont, thoughtfully and with that quaint, almost indefinable touch of foreign accent, "that is true. We might say that we don't know what you mean by offering us a truce. We might pretend that we have always been, and always shall be, on the friendliest of terms with you. But we know, as well as you, that it is not so. Since we share a common danger and since our safety depends on our mutual loyalty, we, sir, agree to your offer. A truce it shall be while our danger lasts, and here's my hand that it will be an honest truce."

It was easy to see that Gleazen and Matterson were not altogether pleased by his words. They would have liked, I think, to have us apprehend the situation less clearly. But there was nothing to do but make the best of matters; so Gleazen shook Arnold's hand, and we took an inventory of our provisions, which were quite too few to last through a siege of any length.

"To-morrow night, surely we can run for it," said

O'Hara. "To-night they'll watch us like hawks, but to-morrow night — "

Plainly it was that for which we must wait.

We divided our food into equal portions, each to serve for one meal,— the meals, we saw, were to be very few,— ate one portion on the spot and settled ourselves to watch and sleep. But before I fell asleep I heard something that still further enlightened me.

"Now, why," asked Gleazen, sourly, as he faced the other two in the darkness, "could n't *one* of you ha' stayed with Bull, even if the other was fool enough to go a-wandering?"

Matterson quietly smiled. "Bud, here, swore he'd never leave him."

"We-e-ell," O'Hara drawled, irritably, "you was both of you too long gone and Bull was set in his ways. It was 'Step this side,' and 'Step that!' And 'Those stones are yourn and those are mine and those are for the company.' Says I at last, 'Them that you've laid out for me, I'll take to the coast. Keep the rest of them if you wish.' Says he, 'You'll leave me here to rot.' 'Not so,' says I. 'By hook or by crook Neil will get the vessel surely, and Molly will arrange the market surely, for they're good men and not to be turned lightly off. Do you clean the pocket, and build the house. Surely the pocket that has sent Neil home like a gentleman, and has sent Molly west like a man of business, will provide us at least the wherewithal to buy *one* cargo. And with a cargo under our own hatches,' says I, 'four fortunes will soon be made.' 'Do you go,' says he, 'and I'll build a house like a duke's mansion to live in, and dig the pocket out and make friends with the niggers, which eventually we will catch, and four fortunes we will make.' So I come away, and you two surely would 'a' done the same if you'd been in my

breeches instead of me; and then he went and built his house on the king's grave!"

As I lay on the floor, not three feet from the skeleton and from the round bag of quartz-like stones, through half-closed eyes I saw against the door, beyond which the sun was shining with intense heat, the great black shadow that I knew was Matterson, with a musket across his knees; then, so exhausted was I, that I forgot the grim object within arm's length of where I lay, forgot our feud with Matterson and Gleazen and O'Hara, forgot every ominous event that had happened since the Adventure had set sail four days before and moved down the river toward the open sea, and, falling asleep, dreamed of someone whom, strangely, I could not forget.

The sun had set and the moon was up when my turn came to go on guard. Taking Matterson's musket and his place by the open door where I could see all that went on without, but where no one outside could see me in the dark of the hut, I settled myself with my back against the jamb. In Matterson's motions as he handed me the musket and went over by the skeleton and lay down, there was the same lithe strength that he had revealed when he lifted himself to the taffrail and boarded the Adventure in Havana harbor. I marveled that he could endure so much with so little drain on his physical powers.

"Watch sharply, Joe, there's a brave lad," he said in his light voice.

As he crossed the hut and laid his great body on the floor, so slowly yet so lightly, I thought to myself that I had never seen a lazier man. What a power he might have been at sea or ashore, had he had but a tithe of Gleazen's bold effrontery! Although he had shown none of Gleazen's passionate recklessness, he had given no sign of fear under any circumstances that we had yet encountered. I won-

dered if it were not likely that the man's very quietness, the complete absence of such petulance as Gleazen sometimes showed, sprang from a deep, well-proved confidence in his own might.

I was glad that it had fallen to me to guard the door rather than a window. Whereas from the windows one could see only a short space of rough open park and then the intermatted tangle of vines, from the door the vista ran far down the hill to the open glade where, hidden in deep grass, the spring lay. But though I sat with the musket beside me for hours, and though the moon rose higher and higher, revealing every tree and bush, in all my watch I did not see one thing astir outside the hut.

I must repeat that we seemed to be living in a dream. We had seen no enemy, heard no enemy. For all the signs and sights that those walls of tangled creepers revealed to us, there might have been no human being within a hundred miles. Yet from behind those walls had come three arrows, and for the time being those three arrows locked us in the hut as fast as if they had been bolts and chains and padlocks.

As I watched, I heard someone get up and walk around the hut; and when I glanced over my shoulder, I saw that it was my uncle. To my surprise he was talking in a low voice. Now what, I wondered, possessed him to stay awake when he might be sleeping.

"I must be getting home," I heard him say as he came nearer; and his voice startled me because, although it spoke softly, it was the old sharp, domineering voice that I had known so long and so well in Topham; "I must be getting home. I don't know when I've stayed so late at the store."

CHAPTER XXIII

SORTIE

Night and morning we got little rest. We ate another meal from our slender store; but it was a fearful thing to see how few meals remained; and though in part we satisfied our hunger, our thirst seemed more unendurable than ever.

"Eat light and belt tight," O'Hara muttered. "Last night they was watching like cats at a rat-hole. To-night surely they'll not be so eager. It'll be to-night that we can make our dash to the river."

Once more the sun was shining on the green, open space around the hut. A huge butterfly, blazing with gaudy tropical colors, fluttered out from some nook among the creepers where it had been hidden, and on slow wings sailed almost up to us, loitered a moment beside a blue flower, and again took flight through the still air to the opposite forest wall.

"If Neil Gleazen had as much brains under his hair as he has hair to cover his head," Matterson softly remarked, "we'd have brought enough food so that we'd not have to go hungry."

"Food!" Gleazen roared. "Food, is it? You eat like a hog, you glutton. And who was to know that Bull would not have a house full of food to feast us on? Who was to know that Bull would be dead?"

At that a silence fell upon us.

As usual, though we had agreed to a truce between our two parties, Gleazen, Matterson, and O'Hara sat on one side of the room, the side where the skeleton and the bag

of pebbles lay, and Arnold, Abe and I sat on the other, with poor Uncle Seth wandering about at will between us.

There was that in my uncle's manner which I could not understand; and as I watched him, Abe Guptil touched my elbow.

"Something queer ails Seth Upham," he whispered.

"I know it," I replied.

"I don't like to see him act that way."

"Nor I."

Abe regarded me thoughtfully. "Now ain't it queer how things turn out?" he whispered. "I mind the day you come to my house and told me I'd got to flit. It was a bitter day for me, Joe, and yet do you know, I'd kind o' like to be back there, even if it was all to go through again. I swear, though, I'd never sail again with Mr. Gleazen."

There was something so ingenuous in Abe's way of saying that he wished he had never come, that I smiled; but it touched me to remember all that Abe and I had faced together; and Abe himself, with keen Yankee shrewdness, added in an undertone, "It's all very well for O'Hara to talk of making our break to-night. I'm thinking, Joe, it is upon us a storm will break before we get free and clear of this camp."

As the sun rose higher and higher, the sunlight steadily grew warmer. The air shimmered with heat, and the house itself became as hot, it seemed, as an oven over a charcoal fire. Sweat streamed from our faces and, having had no water now for nearly twenty-four hours, we suffered agonies of thirst.

Never were men in a more utterly tantalizing predicament. Whether or not it was cooler outside the hut than within, it surely could have been no hotter; and from the door straight down the hill to the spring there led a broad, open path. The spring was only a short distance away, and

there was, so far as we could see, not a living creature between us and cold water in abundance. Hour after hour the green, deep grass around it mocked us. Yet in the wattled hut, under the thatched roof, we were prisoners.

Three arrows, shot by we knew not whom, every one of them now in our own hands, were the only warnings that we had received; but not a man of us dared disobey the message that those three arrows had brought.

The day wore on, through the long and dreary watches of the morning, through the tortures of high noon, and through the less harsh afternoon hours. We ate another of our few remaining meals and watched the sun set and the darkness come swiftly. The shadows, growing longer and longer, reached out across the clearing to the trees on the opposite side; and suddenly, darkly, swept up the eastern wall of the forest. As the light vanished, night enfolded us. The stars that flashed into the sky only intensified the utter blackness of the woods.

O'Hara uneasily stirred and stretched himself in the darkness like a dog.

"Now, lads," he whispered, "now's the time to gather things together. At two in the morning we'll run for it. Then's the hour they'll be sleeping like so many black pigs."

Gleazen moved and groaned,— it was almost the first time that he had yielded in the least to the pain of his wound.

"Can you travel by yourself, Neil?" Matterson asked. "Or shall I carry you on my back?"

When it came to me that the question was no joke, that Matterson actually meant it, I could not keep from staring at him in amazement. He was a tremendous man, but there was something honestly heroic in his offering to carry Cornelius Gleazen's weight back over all those miles.

Gleazen smiled and shook his head. "Thanks, Mat," he replied, "but I'll make out to scramble along."

The word "scramble," it seemed, caught Uncle Seth's attention, and with a curt nod, he said, "Yes, scramble them; use them any way but boiled. We can't sell cracked eggs in the store, but they're perfectly good to use at home."

We all looked in amazement, and Gleazen, in spite of his pain, hoarsely laughed.

"Why, Seth," he cried, "are you gone crazy?"

My uncle stared blankly at him and continued to pace the room.

In the silence that ensued, Gleazen's words seemed to echo and reëcho; though they were spoken quietly, even in jest, their significance was truly terrible.

"Gentlemen," said Arnold Lamont in a very low voice, "Seth Upham, I fear, is not well. We must not let him stand guard. *We cannot trust him!*"

"Name of heaven!" whispered Matterson, "the man's right. Upham is turning queer."

As I watched my uncle, my mother's only brother, the last of all my kin, a choking rose in my throat. He did not see me at all. He saw none of us. In mind and spirit he was thousands of miles away from us. I started toward him, but when his eyes met mine dully and with no indication that he recognized me, I swallowed hard and turned back.

Never was a night so long and ghastly! With all prepared for our dash to the river, with Uncle Seth wandering back and forth, and with the rest of us divided into three watches of two each, that overlapped by an hour, so that four men were always on guard, we watched and waited until midnight passed and the morning hours came.

When the moon was at the zenith, O'Hara woke Mat-

terson, and we gathered by the packs, which were made up and ready.

"Poor Bull!" said O'Hara, brushing his hand across his eyes. "Sure, and I hate to leave him thus. If ever man deserved a decent burial, it's him."

"If men got what they deserved," Gleazen briefly retorted, "Bull would never have drove the ship on the island, and we'd never have had to divide up this here find which Bull dug up for us, and Bull would never have had to stand by the hill to get himself killed, in the first place."

Each man had tied up his own belongings to suit himself, and had put in his pocket his share of what little food was left. The different packs stood in the middle of the hut, but it was noticeable that, although each man was nearest his own, Matterson was eyeing Gleazen's with a show of keener interest.

"Let me carry your bundle, Neil, you with a hole in your leg," he said.

"No," Gleazen replied.

"I'll never notice the weight of it."

"Keep your hand off, Molly. I'll carry my own bundle."

"As you please."

Matterson turned away and stepped to one side.

All this I noticed, at first, mainly, if the truth be known, because I saw how closely Arnold Lamont was noticing it, but later because the manner of the two men convinced me that Gleazen's pack held the bag that the others were so carefully guarding.

Now that our food was almost gone, there remained so very little baggage of any kind for us to carry, that there was no good reason that I could see for not putting our odds and ends of clothing and ammunition into, say, two convenient bundles, at which we could take turns during

our forced march to the river, or, indeed, for not abandoning the mere baggage altogether. But Gleazen, Matterson, and O'Hara had planned otherwise. Having allotted to each of us his share of the food that remained, and an equal seventh of our various common possessions, they kept three of the muskets themselves, and gave the fourth to poor Seth Upham, which seemed to me so mad an act that I was on the point of questioning its wisdom, when Arnold caught my eye and signaled me to be still.

Gathering in the door of the hut, we looked out into the silent, moonlit glade that led down the hill and through the valley toward the distant river.

"Are we all ready, lads?" Matterson asked in his light voice.

"Push on, Molly, push on," Gleazen replied.

Shouldering his pack, Matterson stepped out into the moonlight. "Now, then," he whispered,— for although we were confident that no enemy within earshot was then awake (it had not been hard for O'Hara to persuade us to his own way of thinking), a spell of silence and secrecy was upon us,— "it's straight for the river, lads, and the devil take the hindermost. If you're too lame to travel, Neil, so help me, I'll carry you."

"Push on!" Gleazen returned hoarsely. "Push on to the spring. After that we'll talk if you wish."

"We're going home," I thought. Home, indeed! It seemed that at last we had turned the corner; that at last we had passed the height of land and were on the point of racing down the long slope; that at last our troubles were over and done with. A score of figures to express it leaped into my mind. And first of all, best of all, at last we were to get water!

Arnold said sharply, "Come, Abe; come, Joe; step along."

Bending low, Matterson led the way, I followed close at his heels, and the others came in single file behind me. Seven dark figures, silently slipping from shadow to shadow, we left behind us the hut,— we believed forever! — and headed straight down the hill to the spring; for more than anything else we longed to plunge our faces into cold water and drink until we had quenched our burning thirst.

Down the hill to the spring we went, slipping along in single file. All night and all day, without a word, we had endured agony; for it was by showing no sign of life whatever to those who were guarding the hut from the forest that we hoped so to lull their watchfulness that we could escape them just after midnight. And now we were eager almost beyond words for that water which we had so vividly imagined. As we darted into the tall grass, it seemed so completely assured that I swung my pack from my shoulder and broke into a quick trot after Matterson, whose long, swift strides, as he straightened up, had carried him on ahead of me.

If a thousand people read this tale, not one of them, probably, will know the full meaning of the word thirst; not one will understand what water had come by then to mean to me.

I ran — I tried to run faster — faster! But as I dragged my pack along, bumping at my knees, I was amazed to see Matterson stop. He threw his musket to his shoulder. The hollow boom of it went rolling off through the woodland and echoed slowly away into silence among the mighty trees. Then he threw his hands up, and with a cry fell into the grass, and lay so still that I could not tell where he had fallen.

By the flash of his musket I and those behind me had for an instant seen by the spring a grotesque figure dressed in skins and rags, and painted with white rings and bars.

When the flash died away, we could see nothing, not even the waving grasses and the black trees against the sky, because momentarily the sudden glare had blinded us.

As if impelled by another will than mine, I drew back step by step until I was standing shoulder to shoulder with the others. Whatever quarrels we had had among ourselves were for the time forgotten.

"Now, by heaven," Gleazen gasped, "it's back to the hut for all of us!"

"But Neil — now, Neil, sure now we can't run away and leave old Molly," O'Hara cried.

"Leave him?" Gleazen roared. "We've got to leave him! Where is he? Tell me if you can! Go find him if you like! Hark! See!"

With a thin, windy whistle a spear came flying out of the night and passed just over Gleazen's shoulder and his pack. Another with a soft *chug* struck into the ground at my feet; then, my eyes having once more become accustomed to the moonlight, I saw sneaking into the clearing a score of dark, slinking figures.

"They're coming!" I cried. "They're cutting us off! Quick! Quick!" In panic I started back to the hut, with the others at my heels.

When they saw the figures that I had seen, Gleazen and O'Hara both fired their muskets, whereupon the figures disappeared and we, deafened by the tremendous reports and blinded again by the bright flashes, ran back as hard as we could go to the hut that so short a time since we had eagerly abandoned; and with Gleazen limping in the rear, fairly threw ourselves across the threshold.

Whether our gunfire had done any real damage, we gravely doubted; and now we were both a man and a weapon short. But bitterest of all, and by far the most discouraging, was our intense thirst.

"Ah, the black devils," O'Hara muttered between grinding teeth. "Sure, and they planned all that — planned to let us get the water almost between our lips and then drive us back here. The black cowards, they dare not meet us man to man, though they are forty to our one."

It was significant that no one spoke of Matterson. The silence as regarded his name marked a certain fatalism, which now possessed us — something akin to despair, yet not so ignoble as despair; something akin to resolution, yet not so praiseworthy as resolution. There seemed, indeed, nothing to say about him. Bull was dead, I thought, and Matterson was dead; and even if the blacks dared not rush upon us and take the hut by storm, they would soon kill us by thirst. We had done our best; if worst came to worst, we would die with our boots on.

Meanwhile queer low cries out in the forest were rising little by little to shrill yells and hoots and cat-calls. If we could judge by the sounds, there were hundreds of blacks, if not thousands.

"O Bull! You poor, deluded fool!" O'Hara cried. "Now why — why — *why* did he go and build the house on a king's grave?"

Why indeed?

It was a fearful thing to hear those cries and yells; yet, although we watched from door and windows a long while, we did not actually see any further sign of danger, until Arnold Lamont, who was guarding the door, said in a subdued voice, "Look — down the hill — half-way down. Something has moved twice."

As we gathered behind him, he turned and with a quick gesture said, "Do not leave the windows. Who knows what trick they may try upon us?"

My uncle, who seemed for the moment to comprehend all that was going forward, and Abe Guptil and Gleazen,

went back to the windows, although it was evident enough that their minds were not so much on their own duty as on whatever it was that had caught Arnold's attention.

"See!" said Arnold.

There was nothing down there now that seemed not to belong by nature to the place, and I surmised that Arnold had seen only some small animal. But that a black object, appearing and disappearing, had revealed more to the others than to me, I immediately apprehended.

"It was fifty feet farther down the hill when I first distinguished it," said Arnold.

O'Hara went over to my uncle and I heard him say, "Let me take your gun, since it's loaded, Mr. Upham, and thank you kindly."

Returning, he sat down in the door beside Arnold, who had begun meanwhile to load the empty musket that O'Hara had carelessly laid aside. When the thing, whatever it was, moved again, O'Hara raised the gun to his shoulder.

"Don't shoot!" Arnold whispered.

"And why not?"

The thing moved once more.

"Will ye look, now! It's come ten feet in this direction," O'Hara whispered.

Now Arnold raised his own musket.

Again we saw the thing, but so briefly that neither Arnold nor O'Hara had time to fire.

Suddenly O'Hara laid his hand on Arnold's shoulder and repeated Arnold's own words: —

"Don't shoot."

"This time," Arnold whispered, "I shall shoot."

"Wait a bit, wait a bit!" O'Hara gently pressed down the muzzle of the gun.

Meanwhile, you must understand, the yelling and hoot-

ing had first grown loud and near, then had drawn slowly farther away. It was not easy to let that creature, be it animal or human, come crawling up the hill in the full light of the moon. As the cries died in the distance, the thing moved faster and with less concealment, and I fiercely whispered, "Shoot, Arnold, shoot!"

"Wait," he replied and lifted a restraining hand.

At the moment I could not understand why he did not do as I said; but as the thing came out into open ground, the same thought that had caused the two to hold their fire occurred likewise to me; and now we saw that we were right.

The thing crawling up the hill was a man, and when the man came into the open clearing directly in front of our camp, we saw that it was Matterson.

Without a word, followed closely by O'Hara, who laid his gun on the threshold, I leaped out past Arnold and ran down to Matterson and helped him to his feet and led him groaning up to the hut.

VI

FOR OUR VERY LIVES

CHAPTER XXIV

SPEARS IN THE DARK

"O-o-oh!" he moaned. "They got me. It's a wonder they did n't kill me. But here I am along with old Neil Gleazen."

"Where's your bundle?" Gleazen demanded.

"Down in the grass by the spring."

"Let me tell you, Matterson, it 's good I carried my own."

Matterson repressed another groan and made no answer.

Blood was running from a great gash above his ear and across his cheek, which we hastened to bind to the best of our ability, and he lay down on the floor with his head on his hand.

"I'm on the sick list," he said at last, "but I've had water, and if those black sons of hell have not poisoned the spring, I'll call it quits."

Matterson's face was a ghastly sight, and already blood had reddened the strip of sacking round his head; but I believe there was not a man of us who would not have taken his wound to have got his chance at water.

"If only we could catch a king," Gleazen remarked thoughtfully. "That's the way to end a war in Africa. Catch us a king and make peace on him."

"That's one way surely to end a war," said O'Hara, darkly, "but not this war."

"And why not this war?"

"Because," said O'Hara, "Bull built the house on a king's grave. It's the *spirits* that are offended."

Gleazen laughed unkindly.

"Aye, laugh," cried O'Hara, "that's all you know about spirits. Now I'll tell ye, believe me or not as it pleases ye, that the spirit of a nigger is a bad thing to cross. And care as little as ye please for jujus and fetishes and nigger gods, the times are coming when they'd serve you well if you'd not turned them off by laughing at them."

"Spirits — " said my uncle in an undertone. "Hm! Hollands, Scotch, and Rye. We must lay in more Hollands, Sim; the stock's getting low. And while you are about it, we'd best take an inventory of our cordials."

Gleazen fluently swore, and watched Seth Upham with a keen, appraising look. There was no doubt that in his own wandering mind my uncle was back again in his store in Topham.

"I'm thirsty," he said suddenly. "I must get a drink of water. Now where's the bucket? Sim, where's the bucket?"

As he fumbled along the wall, we stared at one another with eyes in which there was fear as well as horror. I swallowed hard. Poor, poor Uncle Seth, I thought. What was to become of him? And indeed, for the matter of that, of us all?

By this time I had come to see clearly that poor Seth Upham was in no condition to stand up for his own rights, and that, whether or not he could stand up for his rights, he had no chance of getting them from that precious trio, his associates, without a stronger advocate than mere justice.

They had promised unconditionally that half the profits of their mad voyage should be his, and by that promise alone they had so cruelly persuaded him to sell home and business and embark in their enterprise. Now, deceived, bullied, flouted, he bade fair to lose not only those gains which were rightfully his, but also his vessel, his stores,

and every cent that he had ventured. If there was to be a copper penny saved for him, Arnold, Abe, and I must save it.

Through the rough, less pleasant memories of his abrupt, sharp ways — and so often, even when he was in the abruptest and sharpest of moods he had betrayed unconsciously, even unwillingly, his thought of my future, for which he was building, as well as for his own — there came memories of old days, when he and my mother and I had lived so quietly and happily together in Topham.

I started up, all at once awakened from my reveries, with Abe's dazed voice ringing in my ears. "Look! Look!" he cried. "Look there!"

For the moment, in our horror at my uncle's condition, we had almost forgotten our danger from without.

"Look!" Abe cried again. "In heaven's name look there!"

We crowded shoulder to shoulder by the window where Abe had stationed himself and saw in the moonlit clearing a strange creature, which came dancing and rolling along from the edge of the forest. It was dressed in skins and rags. It was painted with big white rings and bars. Now it began to utter strange whines and squeals and whimpers, in an unearthly tone that it might have produced by blowing on a split quill.

From the corner of my eye I saw that Matterson was biting his lip. At my side I felt O'Hara violently trembling.

Out in the moonlight, where the swaying creepers cast dim, spectral shadows, the gibbering, murmuring creature was coming nearer. Its boldness was appalling. I had been brought up in a Christian country and given a Christian education, but even to me that clumsy, dancing wizard, with his unearthly squeals and cries, brought a superstitious fear so keen that I could scarcely control my

wits. Small wonder that such tricks impose on credulous savages!

"Watch, now!" Gleazen said quietly. He leveled a musket across the window-sill. "Spirits is it? I'll show them."

"Don't shoot," O'Hara cried. "Don't shoot, Neil, don't shoot!"

He reached past me toward Gleazen; but before he could lay hands on the gun, Gleazen fired. A spurt of flame shot from the muzzle, and as the report went thundering off into the forest the medicine man — wizard — devil — call him what you will — seemed curiously to wilt like a drought-killed plant, but more suddenly than ever plant wilted, and fell in a crumpled heap in the moonlight.

"You fool!" O'Hara cried, "you cursed fool! First it was Bull that built the house on a king's grave and now it is you that's killed a devil!"

"He's dead enough," Gleazen calmly replied.

"Look!"

Here and there, along the edge of the forest, men darted into the moonlight. They carried spears, which flashed now and then when the moon fell just so on the points. First they gathered by the body of the wizard and carried it back into the woods. We saw them, a little knot of men with the heavy weight of the fallen mummer in their midst, moving slowly to the wall of vines and through it into the mysterious depths beyond. Then, coming slowly out again, they moved back and forth before the hut as if to appraise our chances of defending it. Then they once more disappeared.

All this time they had walked as if in a world of death. Although we had seen their every gesture, we had not heard a sound loud enough to rival the almost imperceptible drone of insects in the grass. But now we heard again

that grimly familiar, haunting, wild cry. Three times we heard it, terribly mournful and prolonged; then we heard a voice wailing, "White man, I come 'peak: white man all go Dead Land."

The voice died away, a few formless shrieks and yells followed it, and a silence, long and deep, settled upon the clearing.

Once more Arnold, Abe, and I stood on one side of the hut, and Gleazen, Matterson, and O'Hara on the other, with poor Seth Upham wandering aimlessly between us.

There was war within and without. There was almost no food. There was no water at all. I thought, then, that I should never see the town of Topham again; and — which oddly enough seemed even harder to endure — I thought that I never again should see the mission on the river.

"I swear," O'Hara whispered,— so clearly did I hear the words, as I stood with one eye for the inside of the hut and one for the outside, that I jumped like a nervous girl,— "I swear we've started a war that will reach from here to Barbary before it's done. Hearken to that!"

We heard afar off the throbbing of native drums, the roar of distant angry voices, a strange chant sung in some remote African encampment.

CHAPTER XXV

CARDS AND CHESS

Hunger and thirst were stripping away the last vestige of our pretended good-will, and our two parties glared at each other in a sullen rage, which seemed visibly to grow more intense, until it was the most natural thing in the world that Arnold should touch with the toe of his shoe a board that ran from one end of the hut to the other and divided the floor approximately into halves.

"That side," he said, "is yours. This side is ours. You shall not cross that line. You shall guard the hut from that side; we, from this."

Gleazen looked at Matterson, then at O'Hara, then both he and Matterson nodded grim assent.

But although a board across the hut divided us into two hostile camps, we shared a peril so imminent and so overwhelming that we dared not for an instant relax our watchfulness toward our enemies in the forest.

With one eye on our foes without and one on our foes within, we settled ourselves for another night, which I remember by the agonies of thirst that we endured; and with a certain grim confidence, shared by both parties in the hut, that neither would betray the other, since to do so would be to throw away its own one chance for life, we watched and waited for the dawn.

And meanwhile we heard in the forest such a clamor and din as few white men have ever been so unlucky as to hear. First, we heard unseen people running about and furiously screaming; then, here and there through the trees and vines we caught glimpses of flaming torches,

which they swung in great circles and again and again touched to the ground. I was convinced that it preluded an attack, and I screwed up my courage and fingered my pistols and tried not to show my fear; but in a brief lull I learned from something that O'Hara was saying to his companions that they were not preparing for an attack; they were mourning for the wizard whom Gleazen had killed, and with the flaming torches they were driving away evil spirits. Now far down the valley we caught glimpses of moving lights; and once in a while, through pauses in the nearer din, we heard a distant droning, by which we knew that the blacks of the countryside were converging upon us from the remotest districts, along their narrow trails, in thin streams like ants. Minute by minute the cries became more general, and rose to such a hideous intermingling of wails and shrieks as I should not have believed could issue from merely human throats.

By its volume and extent the uproar was an appalling revelation of the number of those who had surrounded us, and I tell you that we seven men in that hut in the clearing were properly frightened. It seemed a miracle that they did not sweep over us in one great irresistible wave and bear us down and blot us out. Yet such was their superstitious fear of things they did not understand, that from the cover of our frail little hut our few firearms still held them at a distance.

Never dreaming that their own power was infinitely superior to ours, attributing the death of their wizard to a witchcraft stronger than his own, they circled round and round us under cover of the forest and dared not come within gunshot.

As day broke, and the sun rose like a ball of fire and blazed down on us and doubled the tortures that we had suffered in the night, we heard the drummers who had

come to pound their drums by the body of the dead wizard. The drumming throbbed and rolled in waves; bells rang and hands clapped; and all the time there was shrieking and wailing and moaning.

They drummed the stars down and the sun up, and when at noon there had been no respite from the din, which by then fairly tortured us, the other three, who had been talking together among themselves, called us to the board across the hut for conference.

"Now, men," O'Hara began, "we'll make no foolish talk of being friends together; surely we and you know how much such talk is worth. But we and you know, surely, that if one party of us is killed, the others will be killed likewise; for we are too few to fight for our lives, even supposing as now that every man jack of us is alive and bustling. Is not that so?

"Now, lads, there's a chance we can break through their line and run for the river while the niggers is praying and mourning over that corpse yonder."

O'Hara stopped as if for us to reply, and I glanced at Arnold, who, meeting my glance, turned to Abe Guptil and thoughtfully said, "Shall we take that chance, Abe?"

"Take any chance, is my feeling, Mr. Lamont. Chances are all too few."

With a nod at O'Hara, Arnold replied, "We are agreed, I think. As you say, there is a chance. You three shall go first. We will follow."

"It's a chance," O'Hara repeated, almost stubbornly.

"We are in a mood for chances," Arnold returned. "But you three must go first."

When O'Hara frowned, hesitated, and acceded, I wondered if he thought we were gullible enough to let them come behind us.

Arnold was quietly smiling, but the others, as they gath-

ered in the door, were grave indeed. There was not one of us who did not know in his heart that our hope was utterly forlorn. Only Arnold — time and again I marveled at him! — sustained that amazing equanimity.

Gleazen shouldered his pack, but the others let theirs lie.

"How about the rest of the baggage?" Arnold asked, as composedly as if he were setting out from the store in Topham upon a two days' journey.

"Leave it to the devils and the ants," Matterson thickly retorted.

Both he and Gleazen were lame from their wounds and must have suffered more than any of the rest of us. How they could face the long, forced march, I did not understand; for though hunger and thirst were my only troubles, my head swam when I moved quickly and my limbs were now very light, now heavier than so much lead. But Gleazen had long since shown his mettle, and Matterson, although he staggered when he walked, set his teeth as he leaned against the wall and waited to start.

If the truth were told, we had no real hope of getting away; and immediately whatever desperate dreams we clung to were frustrated; for, as we appeared in front of the hut and weakly started down the hill, there came a sudden lull in the mad wailing over the dead wizard; black warriors appeared on all sides of us, and a line of them, like hornets streaming out of their nest, emerged from the forest and massed between us and the spring.

"Come, men, it's back to the house," said O'Hara; and back we went, each party to its own side as before, but each turning to the others as if for what pitiful mutual reassurance there could be in such a situation.

"There's war from here to the coast," Matterson muttered. "Such a war as never was before."

The voice that issued from his dry throat was so thick

and husky that I should never have known it for the light, effeminate voice of Matterson.

"It's bad," said Gleazen, "but so help me, they'll be cleaning out old Parmenter and putting an end to the sniveling psalm-singers on this river. And then, lads! Ah, then'll be great times ahead, if once we get free and clear of this accursed hornets' nest."

In the face of our desperate danger, the man was actually exultant. But I thought of the girl at the mission, and a dread filled my heart, so strong that the room went black and I sat down, literally too sick to stand.

With never a word poor Uncle Seth was pacing back and forth across the hut. Of us all, he alone had the liberty of the entire place; but it was a tolerant, contemptuous liberty that the others gave him, and nothing else would have testified so vividly to the way he had fallen in their regard.

It seemed incredible that this pale, gaunt, voiceless man, who suffered so much in silence, who without comment or remark let matters take their own course, who resented no indignity and aspired to no authority, could be that same Seth Upham who had made himself one of the leading men of our own Topham. And indeed it was not the same Seth Upham! Something was broken; something was lost. In my heart of hearts, I knew well enough what it was, but I could not bear to put the thought into words. No man in my place, who had a tender regard for old times and old associations, could have done so.

There had been no life at all in our last attempt to leave the hut. We faced the future now in the listlessness of despair. Still the extraordinary situation continued unchanged. Apparently, so long as we remained in the hut, we were to be ignored. It seemed as if the black fiends must know how bitterly we were suffering as hour after

hour the clamor of their mourning rose and fell; as if they were deliberately torturing us.

When Matterson sat down on the floor with his back against the wall, and began to whittle out bits of wood from one of the legs of the table, I watched him with an inward passion that I made no effort to control. He, for one, was responsible for Seth Upham's sad plight, but with a heart as hard as the blade of his knife he calmly sat for hours whittling, and smiling over his work.

All that day we heard the tumult in the forest; all that day the sun blazed down on the hut and doubled and trebled the tortures of our thirst; all that day Seth Upham paced the hut in silence; and from noon till late afternoon Matterson whittled at little sticks of wood.

Piece by piece there grew before our eyes a set of chessmen. Rough and crude though the men were, they slowly took the familiar shapes of kings and queens and bishops and knights and pawns. When they were done, Matterson hunted through the pockets of the coat that the skeleton still wore, and found a carpenter's pencil, with which he blackened half the men. Then, grunting with pain as he moved, he drew a crude chessboard on the floor squarely in the middle of the hut.

"Lamont," said he, "shall we play?"

Arnold smiled. "I will play you a game," he said.

And with that the two sat down by the board and tossed for white and set up the crudely carved men, and began perhaps the most extraordinary game of chess that ever two men played.

There was something admirable in their very bravado. While the rest of us watched the clearing, every man of us suffering from thirst and hunger, the tortures of the damned, those two, swaying sometimes from sheer weakness, played at chess as coolly as if it were one of the games

that Arnold and Sim had played of old in my uncle's store at Topham; and although to this day I have never really mastered chess, I knew enough of it to perceive that it was no uneven battle that they fought. As the pawns and knights advanced, and the bishops deployed, and the queens came out into the board, the two players became more and more absorbed in their game, which seemed to take them out of themselves and to enable them to forget all that had happened and was happening.

Indeed, it well-nigh hypnotized those of us who were only watching. The ghastly calm of the two, the fierceness with which they fixed their eyes on each move, the coolness with which they ignored the wild clamor, all helped to compose the rest of us, and by their example they made us ashamed of revealing to one another the fears we were struggling against.

"Neil," said O'Hara suddenly,— his harsh, hoarse voice startled even the chess-players,— "shall we have a turn at cards? I do believe there's a wonderful solace in such hazards."

"Cards!" Gleazen echoed. His own voice was stranger than O'Hara's. "We have no cards."

From the pocket of the blue coat on the skeleton O'Hara drew out a dingy old pack, which a dead man's fingers had placed there.

"Sure, and I know where to find them," he said. "Never did Bull travel without them."

With that the two squatted on the floor, and shuffled the cards with a pleasant whir, and dealt and played and dealt again.

It was as if our party had suddenly been transported back to Topham. Such nonchalance was almost beyond my understanding. Matterson, by his cool, bold defiance of danger, seemed to have aroused emulation in every one

And with that the two sat down by the board . . . and began perhaps the most extraordinary game of chess that ever two men played.

of us; and Gleazen, always reckless, now talked as lightly and gayly of the games as if it were a child's play to while away the dull hours of a holiday afternoon.

For the time, abandoning the agreement that neither side should trespass on the other's half of the hut, Abe and I watched from window to window lest the blacks take us by surprise, and now and then we would see someone observing the hut from under the trees a long gunshot away. But although the wails and yells and moans and the constant drumming over the dead wizard never ceased, no man came from the cover of the vines into the clearing.

Now Arnold precisely and clearly said, "Check."

Matterson swore and snapped his fingers and moved.

Again Arnold moved, and again he said, "Check!"

Matterson bent over the board and frowned. After a long delay he moved once more.

Instantly Arnold moved again and in his calm voice repeated, "Check!"

Matterson looked up at him with a strange new respect in his eyes.

"You win!" he cried with an oath. "You've done well. I did n't think you could. You *are* a chess-player."

"I have played a good deal," Arnold quietly replied.

"You have played with better men than Sim Muzzy."

"Yes." For a moment Arnold hesitated, then he added: "I have beaten at chess a great man. It was like to have cost me my sword and my head."

"Your sword?" Matterson repeated slowly. "Your sword and your head?"

There was a question in his voice, but Arnold did not answer it. Returning a curt, "Yes," as if regretting that he had said so much, he brushed Matterson's chessmen together, and looked out of the door and down the long slope at the tall green grass beside the spring, which seemed

as far away from us as did our own well, thousands of miles away in Topham.

And still Gleazen and O'Hara played on. Time and again we heard the whir of shuffling and the slap of cards flung on top of one another.

Now the sun was setting. The swift twilight came upon us and faded into darkness, and the card-players also stopped their game.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN UNSEEN FOE

All day Seth Upham had scarcely said a word. From dawn until dark he had paced the hut, apparently buried deep in thought. Only his gaunt, pitiful face revealed the extent to which he shared our tortures.

Now for the first time in all that day, to our surprise, he spoke; and his first words confirmed every fear we had felt for him.

"The boys ought not to make so much noise," he said. "I must speak to the constable about it."

Matterson softly swore and shifted the bandage on his face. Gleazen significantly looked over at me. Abe Guptil stood with his mouth open and stared at Seth Upham.

Never boys of a New England town made such an uproar as was going on outside. Those wails and yells and hideous drummings and trumpetings were African in every weird cadence and boisterous hoot and clang.

Then, as if the first words had broken a way through his silence, Seth Upham began to talk in a low, hurried voice; and however reluctant we had hitherto been to believe that he was mad, there was no longer any hope for him at all. The man had lost his mind completely under the terrific strain that he had endured.

Small wonder when you think of all that had happened: of how, for Cornelius Gleazen's mad project, he had thrown away a place of honor and assured comfort back in Topham; of how he had been driven deeper and still deeper into Gleazen's nefarious schemes by blackmail for we knew not what crimes that he had committed in his

young-manhood; of how, even in that alliance of thieves, he had fallen from a place of authority to such a place that he got not even civil treatment; of how he had lost reputation, livelihood, money, and now even his vessel.

"I declare, we must put in another constable," he muttered. "Johnson can't even keep the boys in order — In order, did you say? Who else should keep the place in order? — O Sim, if only you had wits to match your good intentions! How can you expect to keep books if you can't keep the stock in order? — " He stopped suddenly and faced the door. "Hark! Who called? I declare, I thought I was a lad again."

Moment by moment, as he paced the hut, we watched his expression change with the mood of his delirium,— sometimes I have wondered if the fever of the tropics did not precipitate his strange frenzy,— and moment by moment his emotions seemed to become more intense.

Now, pursuing that latest fancy, he talked about his boyhood and told how deeply he repented of the wicked life he had led as a young man; told us, all unwittingly, of unsuspected ambitions that had led him from wild ways into sober ones, and of his youthful determination to win a creditable place in the community; told us of the hard honest work that he had given to accomplish it. Now he revealed the pride he had taken in all that he had succeeded in doing and building, and — which touched me more than I can tell you — how he had counted on me, his only kinsman, to take his place and carry on his work. All this, you understand, not as if he were talking to us or to anyone else, but as if he were thinking out loud,— as indeed he was,— merely running over in his own mind the story of his life.

Now he reverted again to his repentance for the wicked youth that he had lived. And now, suddenly, his manner

of speaking changed, and from merely thinking aloud he burst out into wild accusation.

"The dice are loaded," he cried,— his voice was hoarse and strained with the agonies that he, like all of us, had endured and was still enduring,— "the dice are loaded. I'll not play with loaded dice, Neil Gleazen!"

At that Gleazen gasped out a queer whisper.

But already Seth Upham's mind was racing away on another tack.

"Aye, loaded with the blessed weight of salvation. Did n't my old mother, God bless her, teach me at her knee that a man's soul can never die? Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name —"

Staring at him in horror, we saw that he was not blasphemous. The words came reverently from his weak lips. He simply was mad.

Suddenly in a high-pitched voice, he began to sing,

> "Low at Thy gracious feet I bend,
> My God, my everlasting friend."

He sang three stanzas of the hymn in a way that appalled every one of those three men who of us all, I think, were least easily appalled — indeed, I think that for once they were more appalled than the rest of us; certainly none of them had Arnold's composure or Abe's obvious, almost overpowering sympathy for poor Seth Upham. Then he stopped and faced about with eyes strangely aflame. In his manner now there was all his old imperiousness and something more, an almost noble dignity, a commanding enthusiasm, which, whether it came from madness alone or whether it had always been in him, got respect even from Matterson and O'Hara.

"I am going to meet my God face to face at the throne of Judgment," he cried.

It was the first time in days that he had addressed us directly, and he spoke with a fierce intensity that amazed us; then, before we guessed what was in his disordered mind, before a man of us could stop him, he stepped outside the door and flung his arms straight out like a cross, and with his head thrown back marched, singing, into the darkness.

"By Heaven!" Gleazen gasped, "he has set sail now for the port of Kingdom Come!"

We who remained in the hut, where a spell of silence had fallen, could hear him strongly and clearly singing as he strode down the long, dark vista toward the spring: —

"Lo what a glorious sight appears
To our believing eyes!
The earth and seas are past away,
And the old rolling skies!"

It may seem strange to one who reads of that fearful night that we did not rush after him and drag him back. But at the time we were taken completely by surprise, literally stupefied by the extraordinary climax of our days and nights of suffering and anxiety; and even then, I think,— certainly I have later come to believe it,— we felt in our inmost hearts that it was kinder to let him go.

He went down the hill, singing like an innocent child. His voice, which but a moment before had been pathetically weak, had now become all at once as clear as silver. And still the words came back from the tall grass by the spring, where creatures ten thousand times worse than any crawling son of the serpent of Eden lay in wait for him: —

"Attending angels shout for joy,
And the bright armies sing,
Mortals, behold the sacred feet;
Of your descending King."

Then the song quavered and died away, and there came back to us a queer choking cry; then the silence of the jungle, enigmatic, ominous, unfathomable, enfolded us all, and we sat for a long time with never a word between us.

The wailing and drumming over the body of the dead wizard had suddenly and completely ceased. At what was coming next, not a man of us ventured to guess.

Gleazen was first to break that ghastly silence. "They got him," he whispered. For once the man was awed.

"No," said Arnold Lamont, very quietly, "they have not got him. Unless I am mistaken, his madness purged his soul of its black stains, and he went straight to the God whose name was on his lips when he died."

Of that we never spoke again. Some thought one thing; some, another. We had no heart to argue it.

Poor Uncle Seth! What he had done in his youth that brought him at last to that bitterly tragic end, perhaps no other besides Cornelius Gleazen really knew, and Cornelius Gleazen, be it said to his everlasting credit, never told. But for all that, I was to learn a certain story long afterward and far away. Not one man in hundreds of thousands pays such a penalty for blasphemous sins of his mature years; and whatever Seth Upham had done, however dark the memory, it had been a boy's fault, which he had so well lived down that, when Cornelius Gleazen came back to Topham, no one in the whole world, except those two, would have believed it of him.

In that grim, threatening silence, which enfolded us like a thick, new blanket, we forgot our own quarrel; we almost forgot the very cause for which we had risked, and now bade fair to lose, our lives.

We were six men, two of us wounded, three of us arrant desperadoes, but all of us at least white of skin, surrounded by a black horde that was able, if ever it knew its own

power, to wipe us at one blow clean off the face of the earth. Now that the terrible thing which had just happened had broken down and done away with every thought of those trivial enmities that fed on such unworthy motives as desire for riches, our common danger bound us, in spite of every antagonism, closer together than brothers. By some strange power that cry which had come back to us when Seth Upham's song ended not only enforced a truce between our two parties, but so brought out the naked sincerity of each one of us, that we knew, each and all, without a spoken word, that for the time being we could trust one another.

Gleazen, always reckless, was the first to break the silence. From the wall he took down a pewter mug, which the dead man they called Bull had hung there. Pretending to pour into it wine from an imaginary bottle, he looked across it at Arnold.

"This is not the vintage I should choose for my toast," he said with a wry mouth, "but it must serve. Yes, Lamont, it must serve." He raised the mug high. "In half an hour we'll be six dead men. I drink — to the next one to go."

Arnold coolly smiled. Pretending to raise a glass and clink it against the mug, he, too, went through the pantomime of drinking.

I was not surprised that Abe Guptil was staring at them, his lips parted, or that his face was pale. Although drunk only in make-believe, it was a toast to make a man think twice. I drew a deep breath ; I could only admire the coolness of the two.

Yet now and then there flashed in Arnold's eye a hint of resourceful determination such as Gleazen probably never dreamed of, a hint of scorn for such theatrical trickery.

We were all on our feet now, standing together in our

silent truce, when we heard for the last time that sound, so unhappily familiar, the long-drawn wailing cry that, whenever the wizard spoke, had preceded and followed his harangue. Coming from the dark forest beyond the clearing, it brought home to us more vividly than ever the ominous silence that had ensued since Seth Upham fell by the spring. Then that familiar, accursed voice, faint but penetrating, came from the wall of vines: -

"White man, him go Dead Land!

"White man, him go Dead Land!

"White man, him go Dead Land!

CHAPTER XXVII

THE FORT FALLS

"Now, by the holy," O'Hara whimpered, "it's fight for our lives, or hand them away like so many maundy pennies."

"Fight, is it?" Gleazen roared. And forgetting his stiff wounds, he sprang to his feet. "Load those guns! Name of heaven, be quick!"

Why at this particular time the bawling voice of the native should thus have called us to action is not easy to say, for you would think that, having become familiar with it, we should have regarded it with proverbial contempt. But we knew that the deadlock could not last forever; Seth Upham's fate was all too vivid in our minds; and I really think that, in the strange voice itself, there was more than a hint of what was to follow.

Forgotten now was the edict that one party should stay on one side of the hut, the other on the opposite side. Forgotten, even, was the bag of stones in Gleazen's pack. Armed with every weapon that the hut afforded, we stood behind door and window and saw a sight that appalled the bravest of us.

Straight up the hill from the spring where they had killed Seth Upham there streamed a raging black horde. The rising moon shone on their spears and revealed the endless multitudes that came hard at the heels of the leaders. Their yells reverberated from wall to wall of the forest and even, it seemed to us, to the starry sky above them.

As we fired on them, the streamers of flame from our guns darted into the night and the acrid smoke drifted

back to us. But though they faltered, this time they came doggedly on. Already in the moonlight we could distinguish individuals; now we could see their contorted features alive with rage and vindictiveness. That they would take the hut by storm, there was not the slightest doubt; nor was there a ray of hope that we should survive its fall.

It was a long, long way from Topham to that wattled hut in a clearing on the side of an African hill, and in more ways than one it was a far call from Higgleby's barn. But it was Higgleby's barn that I thought of then — Higgleby's barn in the pasture, with a light shining through a crack between the boards, and a boy scaling the wall under the window; Higgleby's barn in the dark, with tongues of flame running out from it through the grass. Truly, I thought in metaphor, which was rare for me, the fire that sprang up so long ago in Higgleby's barn had already killed Seth Upham, and now it was going to enfold and engulf us all.

Then I thought of the mission on the river, and the girl whom I had seen first among the mangroves, then in the darkness on the mission porch. Did the war actually reach to the coast? And would the war wipe out "old Parmenter" as Gleazen had said? By heaven, I thought, it would not and it should not!

All this, of course, takes far longer to tell, than it took to go coursing through my mind. In the time it took to think it out, not one black foot struck the ground; not one left the ground. Before that racing army of negroes had advanced another step, the answer had come to me; and now, no longer the boy who had climbed in idle curiosity the wall of Higgleby's barn, but a man to think and act, I cried from my dry throat: —

"Out of the back window, men! O'Hara, help me brace the door! Out of the window and over the hill!"

With an oath Gleazen cried, "He's right! They're all coming on us up the hill! The back way's our only chance!"

O'Hara, in spite of my call for help, led the way out of the back window; but Arnold paused to jam chairs and boards against the door; and Gleazen, ever reckless, stooped in the darkness and picked something up. As we sprang to the window, he came last of all, and I saw that he, the only one to think of it in that hour of desperate peril, was of a mind to bring his pack — the pack that had held the thing for which we had left our homes and crossed the seas. I saw Matterson clinging to brave Abe Guptil's shoulder, and striving desperately, with Abe's help, to keep pace with O'Hara, who in all this time had not got so much as a scratch. I saw the forest wherein lay our sole hope of safety, and terribly far off it seemed. Then I rolled out into the moonlight, and ran as if the devil were at my heels.

Almost at once I heard Gleazen come tumbling after me, and gasp with a frightful oath that the pack had caught and he had left it.

As we ran, we kept, as far as possible, the house between us and the blacks, and so intent were they on attacking our little citadel, that for a moment or two they overlooked our flight.

We heard their cries as they battered down the door, their eager shouts, their sudden silence, and then the fierce yell of discovery when they saw us in the moonlight. It occurred to me then that, but for my poor uncle's death down by the spring, which had very likely caused them to break their circle and gather there in the open, we should not have had so easy a time of it when we fled over the hill behind the hut. Weak though we were, despair was a mighty stimulus and we ran desperately for the woods;

but although we had got a fair start, the pack was now yelping in full cry on our trail.

The pitiful futility of it all, I thought. Seth Upham was dead — the stones were lost — we ourselves were hunted for our lives! As I staggered after the others straight into the wall of almost impenetrable vines, I turned in the act of wriggling through it and let fly with my pistol. Compared with the muskets, the pistol made a dainty little spit of fire and sound, but it served to delay the foremost negroes, and with our scanty hopes a little brighter for their hesitation, I struggled on to come up with the others.

It was well for us, after all, that O'Hara had taken the lead. Say what you will against him, the man knew the country. First, guided by the general lay of the land, he led us down the hill, through rocks and brush, straight to a stream where we drank and — warned by Arnold Lamont — fought against the temptation to drink more than a tiny fraction of what we desired.

Revived by the plunge into water, we turned and followed O'Hara up the stream-bed, bending low so that no onlooker could see us, climbed a great precipitous hill down which the stream tumbled in noisy cascades that hid every sound of our flight, drank again, and kept on up into the rocks away from the water. Not daring to raise our heads above the dry bed of the rainy-season torrent along which we now hurried, we never once looked back down the slope up which we had toiled, panting and puffing and reeling; but behind us, far behind us now, we could hear the shrieks and yells of the disappointed savages, who, having outflanked the timber into which we disappeared, and having wasted many minutes in beating through it, a manœuvre that their wholesome respect for our firearms had much delayed, had now come out on the brow of the rocky declivity leading down to the creek, and

were losing much time, if we could judge by their clamor, in arguing which way we were likely to have gone.

I wonder if the whole performance to which we owed our lives was not characteristic of the natives of the African coast? If therein did not lie just the difference between a people so easily led into slavery and a people that never, whatever their weaknesses have been, have yielded to their oppressors? It all happened long ago, and it was my only acquaintance with black warfare; but surely we could never thus have thrown American Indians off the scent.

It seemed to me, then, that we had made good our escape and could run straight for the river, and in my enthusiasm I said as much. But Arnold and Abe Guptil shook their heads, and O'Hara significantly raised his hand. "Hark!"

I listened, and realized that an undertone of sound, which I had heard without noticing it, as one hears a clock ticking, was the rumble of drums miles and miles away. While I listened, another drum far to the north took up the grim throbbing note, then another to the east. Then, mingling with the swelling voice of all the drums, — how many of them there were, or in how many villages, I had not the vaguest notion,— I heard human voices down the hill on our right, and after a time other voices down the hill on our left. I then knew that however stupid our pursuers might seem, to reach the river was no such easy task as I had hoped.

For an hour we lay hidden among the rocks, with the world spread out before us in the moonlight. Here and there were small points of fire, which shone as if they were stars reflected on water,— we knew, of course, that there was no water, and that they must, therefore, be lights of village or camp,— and twice, at a distance of half a mile,

men passed with torches. But for the most part we lay shoulder to shoulder, with only the moon and the twinkling points of light to awaken our meditations.

I thought of Uncle Seth dead in the grass by the spring down to which he had gone so bravely. I thought of the hut in which, so far as we knew, still lay the skeleton and the bag of pebbles. And while I was thinking thus, I heard to the southeast the sound of gunshots.

First came several almost together like a volley, then another and another, then two or three more, and after that, at intervals, still others.

O'Hara looked first at the sky and then in the direction of the shooting. "They're attacking a trader's caravan," he said. "There'll be white men in it, surely. The thing for us to do, my lads, is to join up with them. They'll have food."

"Aye, but how?" asked Gleazen.

As if in answer to his question,— a terribly discouraging answer! — we heard, when we stopped to listen, coming up to us out of the night from every side, near and far, the throbbing of drums.

"Aye, 'how?'" O'Hara repeated.

"Can we not," I asked, "work down toward them and break through the blacks?"

"The war has gone to the coast by now, and they are attacking all comers. But it's us they're keen on the trail of, all because Bull built his house on a king's grave and a blithering idiot killed a devil. 'T is true, Joe. If we could work down toward them, come three o'clock in the morning, it might happen even as you say."

There were no torches, now, to be seen; no voices were to be heard. There were only the fixed lights shining like stars and the steadily throbbing drums. Whether or not, back on our trail, the blacks were still hunting for us,

we did not know; but by all signs that we could see, they were settling quietly down for the remainder of the night.

"And if it don't happen like you say," O'Hara added as an afterthought, "we'll be nearer the river surely, and there may be hope for us yet."

At that he looked at Gleazen and smiled, and Gleazen softly laughed and nudged Matterson, at which Matterson swore, because Gleazen's elbow had touched a wound. Then they all three looked at one another and laughed; and remembering the board in the centre of the hut and the law that neither side should trespass on the part allotted to the other, I heartily wished that we had another such board and another such law. We had agreed upon our truce under the stress of great danger. Take away that danger, I thought, and there would be nothing to keep the old coals of hate from springing into flame anew.

Down from the hilltop we went, slowly picking our way among the boulders, to still another brawling stream at the foot. There we drank and waited and reconnoitred, and finally, convinced that we were in no immediate danger, pushed on after our guide, O'Hara.

He first led us down the ravine and through a wild and wooded country; but within two miles the sound of drums, which had become louder and nearer, warned us of a village ahead, and, leaving the stream, we climbed a hill, passed through scattered patches of plantains and yams, from which we took such food as would dull the edge of our hunger, came down again into dense timber, worked our way through it, and emerged at last into an open space above a broad plain.

And all this long way faithful Abe Guptil had half carried, half dragged the great body of Matterson, who fought hard to keep up with the rest of us and strove to

regain the strength that his wound had taken from him, but who despite his bravest efforts, still was sadly weak.

As well as we could judge by the interminable drumming, there were villages on our right and on our left and behind us. By the stars we estimated that it was still an hour before dawn, and by lights on the plain we guessed at the location of the camp of which we had come in search.

We had already wandered so far from the road by which we had come to the mountain, that it seemed as if only a miracle could bring us back to the place on the river where we had left our boat; but in that respect O'Hara was no mean worker of miracles, for his years in Africa had given him an uncanny judgment of direction and distance.

"Yonder will be the river," he said, pointing slightly to the left; "and yonder will surely be the camp where we heard guns firing. Below there'll be a road and the camp will be on the road. I know this place; I've been here before."

With that he once more plunged down the steep declivity and through a growth of scrubby trees to a great prairie, where, even as he had said, a road ran in the direction that our journey led us. Fire not long since had burned over the meadow, and spears of grass from fifteen to twenty feet high had fallen across the road and tangled and twisted so that most of the time we had to bend almost double as we walked. But in that early morning hour there were no travelers on the road except occasional deer, which went dashing off through the grass; and it crossed many streams into which we plunged our hot faces. With water for our thirst and plantains for our hunger, we fared on, until, just as dawn was breaking, we came in sight of the red coals of a fire.

O'Hara raised his hand and we stopped. "The niggers are ahead of us," he whispered. "Beyond the niggers will

be the caravan surely, and beyond the caravan there'll be more niggers."

"The question, then, my friends," said Arnold, slowly, "is whether to go round them and on alone, or to go through the blacks and take our chances on a friendly reception from whoever is camping just ahead."

"That," said O'Hara, "is the question."

"There's no doubt but they're traders," Gleazen muttered. "We'll have to fight before we reach the river. The more on our side, the merrier, I say, when it comes to fighting."

By our silence we assented.

Arnold raised his hand. "It is by surprise, gentlemen, or not at all. Are you ready?"

Breathing hard, we pressed closer together.

"Quickly, then! Together, and with speed!"

Arnold's voice snapped out the orders as if we were a company of military. There was something so commanding, so martial, in his manner and carriage, yet something that fitted him so well and seemed so much a part of his old, calm, taciturn, wise way, that I felt a sudden new wonder at him, a feeling that, well though I thought I had known him, I never had known him.

Then, brought all at once into action by the energy and force of his command, as was every one of the others, I started at the word as did they. Together we ran straight through the camp of sleeping blacks,— so strong was Matterson's spirit, so great his eagerness, that he now kept pace with us almost without help,— straight past the coals of their campfire, over the remnants of their evening meal, over their weapons and shields strewn in the road, and on toward their picket-line. As they woke behind us, bewildered, and groped to learn the cause of the sudden disorder, and realized what was happening, and started up

with angry cries, we leaped, one after another, actually leaped, over a black sentry nodding at his post, over a frail barrier that they had thrown up to conceal their movements, and charged down upon a threatening stockade behind which lay the caravan.

That the caravan kept better watch than their besiegers, we learned first of all; for even as we leaped the barricade and came racing down the road, a gun went off in our faces and a cry of warning called the defenders from their sleep.

"Don't shoot!" O'Hara yelled. "We're white men! Don't shoot!"

All now depended on the men of that caravan. Were they friends or foes, honest men or thieves, we had cast the dice, and on that throw our fate waited.

I heard Gleazen bellowing in Spanish and Arnold Lamont calling in French; then up I came with Matterson and Abe to the crude, hasty rampart of mud and grass, and over I tumbled upon a man who cried out in amazement and raised his gun to strike me down, only to desist at the sight of my white face, which was no whiter than his own. Arnold was ahead of me; Gleazen and Matterson came in, almost at the same moment; then came Abe; and last of all, dumb with terror, O'Hara, who had tripped and fallen midway between the two barricades and had narrowly escaped perishing at the hands of the negro guards.

In we came and about we turned, side by side with the strange whites, and when the hostile spearmen showed signs of rushing upon us, we gave them balls from musket and pistol to remember us by, and they faltered and drew back. But that the end was not yet in sight the thudding of their drums and the growing chorus of their angry yells unmistakably told us.

"Ha! Dey t'ink dey git us yet," one of the strangers

cried, hearing me speak to Arnold in English. "Dis one beeg war. Where he start, who know? Dey fight, how dey fight! Dey come down upon us — whee! Gun, spear — when we start we have feefty slave. Ten we loos' before war hit us so we know and hit back. Ha! Dis one beeg war!"

"How far, tell me," gasped O'Hara, "has the fighting gone?"

"Leesten!" The stranger lifted his hand. "Hear dem drum? One here — one dar — one five mile 'way — one ten mile 'way! Oh, ev'ywhere dem drum! Hear dem yell! How far dis war gone — dis war gone clean to Cuba! Dis one beeg war, by damn!"

"Has the war," I cried, "reached the mission on the river?"

"Ha! You t'ink you see dat meession, hey? Dat meession, he fall down long since time, I'll bet. One good t'ing dat war he do."

If only I had never seen the girl by the river, I thought. If only I could have forgotten her! I turned away. Yet even then I would not have spared one iota of my brief memories of that girl with the strong, kind face and quiet voice. If I never saw her again, I still had something to hold fast. How many times, since Seth Upham went down to die by the spring, had I thought of that girl as one of the few people whom I should be glad to see again, and how many times had I wished that she did not think so ill of me!

"Tell me, you man, where from you come?" the stranger now asked. "You come *pop!* So! Whee!"

At that Gleazen spoke in Spanish, and the man turned like a cat taken unawares and looked at him with shrewd, keen eyes. Then Matterson came up to them and like-

wise began to talk in Spanish, and others crowded round them.

Arnold, after listening for a moment, drew me to one side. "See," he murmured.

Following his gesture, I looked around the camp and saw, in the middle of the clearing, thirty or forty cowering negroes bound fast by bamboo withes. Behind them and mingling with them were bullocks and sheep and goats. Moving restlessly about in the light of earliest morning were numbers of male and female slaves; and on every side were baled hides and bundles of merchandise: ivory, rice, beeswax, and even, it was whispered, gold.

"I fear, my friend," Arnold said in an undertone, "that our hosts are more to the taste of Gleazen than of ourselves."

"You have heard them talking," I whispered. "Tell me what they said."

"Only," replied Arnold, "that *we* have a ship and *they* have a cargo; that it will be to our mutual advantage to join forces."

I looked again at the captive negroes, and again thought of the girl at the mission and of the evil that she had attributed to me.

"To join forces," I said,—and in my excitement I spoke aloud,—"in trading human beings? Not that!"

The others turned.

"What are you two talking about?" Matterson asked quickly in his light voice.

"Of one thing and another," I replied, flushing.

"Come," said Gleazen, boldly, "let us *all* talk together."

"Dis one beeg war!" the trader cried. "To fight — eet is all we can do. Fighting we go, da's what me, I say. See! Sun, he come up!"

"To that," said Arnold, "we all agree. We, sir, will go with you and fight by your side."

"Good! Me, I's happy. You brave men. Dis one beeg war, but we make plenty war back again."

Then he cried out orders in Spanish, and the camp woke to the activities of the new day; and while some of us held off the blacks, the rest of us ate our morning meal in the first golden sunlight of the dawn, with a hum and bustle of packing and harnessing and herding going on around us.

But all the time the drums beat, and far away we would hear now and then calls and shouts that made the strange trader and Gleazen and O'Hara exchange significant glances.

As with loaded muskets we fell in to guard the caravan, and the porters lifted their bundles, and the herders goaded their beasts, and the captive negroes started hopelessly on the road to the river, and the sudden hush of voices made the trample of feet seem three times louder than before, we heard guns behind us.

"Ha! Dose trade gun, hey?" the trader cried, and fell into Spanish.

Wheeling his horse, he anxiously looked back along the road.

One thing for which we had crossed the sea was lost in a hut overrun by an army of vengeful savages. There was no fortune left for us, I knew, unless it were a fortune gained by bartering human souls; and at that, which lay at the real bottom of all Neil Gleazen's schemes, my heart revolted. What chance should we have had of saving for Seth Upham his ship and what money was left, even if he had lived? Small chance, I admitted.

All day we drove on in a forced march, leaving the war to all appearances far behind us and stopping only at noon, by a clear cold stream in the forest, to eat a hasty

meal; and at nightfall, crossing another stretch of prairie, we came to still another forest.

"Here," the trader cried, "here ees one fine leetle river! Here we camp one leetle while! Den we go — like fire — when midnight come, mebbe we see one beeg river!"

That we, who had come the night before from the house on the king's grave, were ready to rest, I can assure you. Never in all my life have I been so heavy with weariness, nay, with downright exhaustion, as on that evening at the edge of that African forest.

The very beasts were weary after the long day's march. The trader's horse hung its head. The bullocks and goats and sheep plodded on before their noisy herders and scarcely quickened their pace at thrust of goad or snap of whip. The captive negroes, wretched creatures doomed to the horrors of the infamous middle passage in the hold of some Cuban or Brazilian slave-ship, wearily dragged along, their chins out-thrust, their hands lashed behind them. The traders' own slaves, bending under the weight of hides and rice and ivory, stumbled as they walked, and even the white men themselves, who had done nothing more than ride or walk over the road, breathed hard and showed drawn faces as they eagerly pushed on or apprehensively looked back.

Into the woods we pressed, thanking in our hearts the Divine Providence that here at least there was no throb of drum, no howling of black heathen, no war at all. The aisles between the great trees were cool and green and inviting. The river rippled over rocks and suggested by its music the luxury of bathing; fruits were to be had for the picking, and there was no doubt in my mind that our hosts would butcher a sheep for the evening meal.

Water, food, and sleep at that moment seemed more desirable than all the dominions of Africa; and water,

food, and sleep, I was confident, were but now at hand. Into the forest we marched, for once relaxing the watchfulness that we had maintained since sunrise, and down the trail to the creek that we could hear murmuring on its way over the rocks and through the underbrush. And there, at the end of our long day's journey, the bushes suddenly blossomed in flame.

Guns boomed in our very faces. Up and down the creek fire flashed in long spurts. The wind brought to our nostrils the stinging smell of powder-smoke. Men and beasts were thrown into wild confusion. In the dim light of the forest I saw coming at us from all sides, naked men armed with trade guns and bows and spears and lances. Louder than the shouts and curses behind us, rang the exultant yells before us.

CHAPTER XXVIII

DOWN THE CURRENT

When I was a boy in school, I one day ran across a translation of Homer's Iliad and carried it home and read it afternoons for a week. During those days I lived in the great pictures of the battles on the plains of Troy, and though afterwards I had seldom thought of them, they had never quite faded from my memory.

It was far indeed from Homer's Iliad to an ambush in an African forest; but the fight that ensued when we walked into that hornets' nest of black warriors nevertheless brought Homer's story vividly to my mind. The spears, I think, suggested the resemblance; or perhaps the wild swiftness of the fight. First an arrow came whistling through the air and struck one of the men on the throat and went through his neck half the length of the shaft. He spun round, spattering me with dark blood that ran from a severed vein, and went down under the feet of the bullocks without a word. Then the bullocks turned, stampeded by the sight and smell of blood, and crowded back upon the sheep and goats, and the porters dropped their burdens and tried to run. O'Hara threw up his musket and shattered the skull of a huge black who came at him with a knife like the blade of a scythe, and, himself stooping to pick up the knife, grappled with another and died, shrieking, from a spear-thrust up under the ribs. Then one of the porters hurled a bundle at a man who was about to cut him down, and the bundle broke and a shower of yellow gold scattered in front of us, whereupon there was a short, fierce rush for plunder.

Side by side with Arnold Lamont and Gleazen, emptying my pistol into the crowd, I saw out of the corner of my eye that the blacks were cutting their way into the heart of the caravan for slaves and booty.

Imagine, if you can, that motley horde which had rushed upon us out of the wood. Some, naked except for loin cloths, brandished spears and howled like enraged maniacs; some, in queer quilted armor and helmets with ostrich plumes, clumsily wielded trade muskets; some advanced boldly under the cover of shields and others, ranging through the underbrush, kept up a desultory flight of arrows. It was primitive, unorganized, ferocious war.

"*Mon dieu*, what a spectacle!" Arnold exclaimed; then, "Now, my friends, quick! To the left! While the thieves steal, we yet may escape!"

Up from the mêlée, streaked with blood and dust, now came the trader. "All, all ees gone!" he wailed, and waved his arms and shrieked and stamped and cursed and jabbered on in Spanish.

Had our enemies been content to delay their plundering until they had killed us all, not one of us would have escaped to tell the true story of that bloody day. But at the sight of a rich caravan and loose gold, the blacks, in the twinkling of an eye, were fighting among themselves.

"Quick!" again cried Arnold's voice, strangely familiar in the midst of that grotesquely unreal uproar, and as amazingly precise as ever. "Quick, gentlemen! It is our only chance."

And with that, he, Gleazen, Matterson, the trader, Abe, and I took to our heels into the bushes. The woods behind the line of the ambush appeared to be deserted. At the foot of a ravine ran the creek. We crossed it by a rude bridge of branches, hastily and silently climbed the opposite bank, and stole off quite unobserved.

A hundred yards farther on, at the sound of a great thrash and clatter, we dove into the undergrowth and lay hidden while a band of blacks tore past us to the scene of battle. But getting hastily up as soon as they were out of sight, we resumed our headlong retreat.

Every bush and tree darkly threatened us. Great rocks, deeply clothed in moss and tumbled so together as to form damp holes and caves, at once tempted us by their scores of hiding-places and filled us with apprehension lest natives might have hidden there before us. But as if we were playing the old game of follow-my-leader, we scrambled up and down, and in and out, and always hard ahead, until we again heard before us a rumble of voices and pounding feet, and a second time, desperately, flung ourselves into the undergrowth and lay all atremble while half a hundred naked negroes, armed with bows and clubs and spears, came trotting, single file, like wolves, and passed us not fifty feet away.

As they disappeared, and while we still dared not move, I saw something stir not five English cubits from my face. I caught my breath and stared at the thing. Ten feet ahead of it; the leaves and ferns rustled, and twenty feet ahead of it then, twitching, it disappeared. I broke out from head to foot in sweat. Unwittingly, we had thrown ourselves down within hand's reach of a great serpent. Whether or not newly gorged, and so too sleepy to resent our nearness, it moved slowly away through the quivering undergrowth.

When we had put a mile between ourselves and the plundered caravan, Matterson turned with an oath. "Poor Bud!" he said in his hard, light voice. "At least, we'll hear no more of jujus and devils and king's graves."

Gleazen shrugged and turned to the trader. "How far is the river?" he asked.

"Mebbe one mile — mebbe two."

"Do you, sir, know the road?" Arnold asked.

The trader nodded and spread his hands as if in despair. "Know heem? I know heem, yes! T'ree, ten, fifty time I come with slave and ivory and hide — now all gone! Forty prime slave all gone! Ev'ytheeng gone!"

Gleazen grunted.

"Let us go to the river," said Arnold.

"Heem reever go by town," wailed the trader. "Heem beeg town! Walls so high and strong!"

"Ah, that is another matter," said Arnold. "But let us go forward at all events. We may, for all that we can tell, strike the river below the town."

So forward we went in the darkness, and a slow, tedious journey it was, particularly for Abe and me, who helped Matterson along as best we could; but we avoided the town by the sound of drumming that issued from behind its walls, and having helped ourselves to fruit from the patches of cultivated land that we passed, we at last emerged from the darkness of the woods into the half light of a great clearing, and saw a vast, black, living surface on which strange lights played unsteadily. It seemed unbelievable that it really could be the same river that we had left so long ago,— in the sense of all that had happened, so very long ago,— and yet I knew, as I watched Gleazen and Matterson, that it must be the same. The black, swift current recalled to my mind the toil that we had expended in coming so far to so little purpose. In which direction the creek lay that we had entered on our way to the ill-fated hut, I had not the remotest idea; but I looked a long time downstream toward the mission.

Bearing around in a rough half-circle, we worked slowly down the bank, until the walls of the town itself were before us, at a safe distance.

"Our boat," said Matterson, grimly, "is fifty miles away."

"Wait here," said I. "There'll be canoes under the town. I'll get one."

Gleazen made a motion as if to go himself, but Arnold shook his head. "No; let Joe go first. He will learn where the canoes are, and do it more quietly than we."

They all sat down by the edge of the water, and, leaving them, I went on alone. It took all the courage I could muster; but having rashly offered, I would not hesitate.

For one thing, it gave me time to think, and in a sense I desired to think, although in another sense it came to me that I was more afraid of my own thoughts than of all the walled towns in Africa. The living nightmare through which we had passed had left me worn in body and mind. That Uncle Seth, upon whom once I had placed every confidence, should have died so tragic a death, now brought me a fresh burst of sorrow, as if I realized it for the first time. It seemed to me that I could hear his sharp yet kindly voice speaking to me of little things in our life at Topham. I thought of one episode after another in those earlier days, some of them, things that had happened while my mother was alive; others, things that had happened after her death; all, things that I had almost forgotten long before. My poor uncle, I thought for the hundredth time — my poor, poor uncle!

Then suddenly another thought came to me and I straightened up and stood well-nigh aghast. By the terms of my uncle's will, of which more than once he had told me, all that had been his was mine!

The river silently swept down between its high banks, past me who stood where the waves licked at my feet, past the black walls of the town, which stood like a sentinel guarding the unknown fastnesses of the continent of

Africa, past high hill and low gravel shoal and bottomless morass, past pawpaw and pine palm and mangrove, to the mission and the sea.

There I stood, as still as a statue, until after a long time I remembered my errand and, like one just awakened, continued on my way.

I found a score of canoes drawn up on the beach under the town, and very carefully placing paddles by one that was large enough for our entire party, I cautiously returned to the others and reported what I had done. Together we all slipped silently along the shore to the canoes, launched the one that I had chosen, and with a last glance up at the pointed roofs of the houses and the sharpened pickets of the stockade, silently paddled, all unobserved, out on the strong current and went flying down into the darkness.

It had been one thing to row up stream against that current. It was quite another, and vastly easier, even though three of us were entirely ignorant of handling such a canoe, to paddle down the swift waters of midstream. Exerting always the greatest care to balance the ticklish wooden craft, which the blacks with their crude adzes had hewn out of a solid log, we sent it, even by our clumsy efforts, fairly flying past the trees ashore; and as it seemed that we had struck the river many miles below the creek where we had left our boat, we had hopes that the one night would bring us within striking distance of the open sea. Indeed, I found myself watching every point and bend, in hope that the mission lay just beyond it.

Estimating that daylight was still two hours away, we drew in shore at Gleazen's suggestion, to raid a patch of yams or plantains.

"A man," he said arrogantly, but with truth, "can't go forever on an empty stomach."

Luckless venture that it was — no sooner did the canoe grate on the beach than a wakeful woman in a hut on the bank set up a squealing and squalling. As we put out again incontinently into the river, we heard, first behind us, then also ahead of us, the roll of those accursed native drums.

To this very day I abhor the sound of drumming. It has a devilishly haunting note that I cannot escape; and small wonder.

We swept on down the current, but now, here and there, the river-banks were alive with blacks, and always the booming of drums ran before us, to warn the country that we were coming. Once, as we passed a wooded point, a spear flew over our heads and went hissing into the water, and I was all for putting over to the other bank. But Arnold, who could use his eyes and ears as well as his head, cried, "No! Watch!"

All at once, under the dark bank of the river, there was screaming and splashing and floundering. The torches that immediately flared up revealed what Arnold, and now the rest of us, expected to see, but they also revealed indistinctly another and more dreadful sight: on the shore, running back and forth in great excitement, were many men; but in the troubled water a negro was struggling in vain to escape from the toils of a huge serpent, which was wrapping itself round him and dragging him down into the river where it had been lying in wait.

To me, even though I knew that that very negro had been watching for a chance to waylay us, the sight of the poor fellow's horrible death almost overcame me.

Not so with Matterson and Gleazen.

With a curse, Matterson cried, "There's one less of them now." His light voice filled me with loathing.

And Gleazen softly laughed.

On down the river we went, with flying paddles, and round a bend. But as we passed the bend, I looked back, and saw coming after us, first one canoe, then two, then six, then so many that I lost all count.

How far we had come in that one night, I had little or no idea; but it was easy to see by the attitude of those who knew the river better than I, that the end of our journey was close at hand. Glancing round at our pursuers, Gleazen spoke in an undertone to Matterson, and both they and the trader studied the shore ahead of us.

"A scant ten miles," Gleazen muttered; "only ten miles more."

I felt the heavy dugout leap forward under the fierce pull of our paddles. The water turned away from the bow in foam, and we fairly outrode the current. But fast though we were, the war fleets behind us were faster. By the next bend they had gained a hundred yards, by the next, another hundred. We now led them by a scant quarter of a mile, and if Gleazen had estimated our distance rightly, they would have had us long before we could reach port. But suddenly, all unexpectedly, round the next bend, not half a mile away, the mission sprang into sight.

There it stood, in the early morning sun, as clean and cool and still as if it were a thousand miles away from Africa and all its wars.

"Give me your pistols," Arnold cried; and when we tossed them to him and in frantic haste resumed our paddling, he coolly renewed the priming and one by one fired them at our pursuers.

That the negroes had a gun we then learned, for they retorted by a single shot; but the shot went wild and the arrows that followed it fell short, and our pistols cooled their eagerness. So we swept in to the landing by the mis-

sion, and beached the canoe, and ran up the long straight path to the mission house as fast as we could go, while the black canoemen paused in midstream and let their craft swing with the current.

The place, as we came rushing up to it, was so quiet, so peaceful, so free from any faintest sign of the terrible days through which we had passed, that it seemed as if, after all, we had never left it; as if we were waking from a troubled sleep; as if we had spent a thousand years in the still, hazy heat of that very clearing. The face in the window, the opening door, only intensified that uncanny sense of familiarity.

The door opened, and the man we had seen before met us. His eyes were stern and inhospitable.

"What?" said he. "Must you bring your vile quarrels and vile wars to the very threshold of one whose whole duty here is to preach the word of God?"

"Those," cried Arnold, angry in turn, but as always, precise in phrase and enunciation, "are hard words to cast at strangers who come to your gate in trouble."

"Trouble, sir, of your own brewing," the missionary retorted. "What you have been up to, I do not know. Nor have I any wish to save your rascally necks from a fate you no doubt richly merit."

"Your words are inclusive," I cried.

"They certainly include you, young man. If you would not be judged by this company that you are keeping, you should think twice or three times before embarking with it."

"Father!" said a low voice.

My heart leaped, but I did not turn my head. Down the river, manned by warriors armed to the teeth, came more canoes of the war. Behind them were more,— and more, — and still more.

"Come, come, you sniveling parson," Gleazen bellowed, "where are your guns? Where's your powder? Come, arm yourself!"

The man turned on him with a look of scorn that no words of mine can properly describe.

"You have brought your dirty quarrel to my door," he said in a grim, hard voice. "Now do you wish me to fight your battles for you?"

Steadily, silently, the canoes were swinging inshore. I saw negroes running into the clearing. On my left I heard a cry so shrill and full of woe that it stood out, even amid the ungodly clamor of the blacks, and commanded my attention.

The man stepped down from the porch.

"This," he said, turning, "is a house of peace. I order you to leave it. I will go down and talk with these men myself."

"You'll never come back alive!" Matterson cried, and hoarsely laughed.

At that the missionary, John Parmenter, merely smiled, and, afraid of neither man nor devil, walked down toward the river and fell dead with a chance arrow through his heart.

There was something truly magnificent in his cold courage, and Gleazen paid him almost involuntary tribute by crying, "There, by heaven, went a brave man!"

But from the door of the house the girl suddenly ran out. Her face was deathly white and her voice shook, but as yet there were no tears in her eyes.

"Father!" she cried, and ran down the path, where occasional arrows still fell, and bent over the dead man.

"Come up, you little fool," Gleazen shouted. "Come back!" Then he jumped and swore, as an arrow with a longer flight than its fellows passed above his head.

The canoes were drawing in upon the shore, very cautiously, deliberately, grimly, in a great half-moon, and more of them were arriving at every moment.

I leaped from the porch and sped down beside the girl.

"Come," I cried, "you — we — can do nothing for him."

"Is it you?" she said. "You — I — go back!"

"Come," I cried hoarsely.

"Don't leave him here."

I bent over and lifted the body, and staggering under its weight, carried it up into the house and laid it on the couch in the big front room.

All this time the noise within and without the mission was deafening. The blacks on the river were howling with fury, and those ashore, who had not already fled to the woods, were wailing in grief and terror. Gleazen and Arnold Lamont had joined forces to organize a defense, the one raving at the arrant cowards who were fleeing from first sight of an enemy, while the other turned the place upside down in search of arms. And still the blacks on the river held off, probably for fear of firearms, though there were indications that as their numbers grew, they were screwing up their courage to decisive action.

The girl, suddenly realizing the object of Arnold's search, said quietly, "There are no weapons."

Arnold threw his hands out in a gesture of despair.

"If you wish to leave," she coldly said, "there is a boat half a mile downstream. You can reach it by the path that leads from the chapel. No one will notice you if you hurry."

"Then," I cried, "we'll go and you shall come with us."

Gleazen spoke to the trader in Spanish.

Abe Guptil was beside me now and Arnold behind me. We three, come what would, were united.

A louder yell than any before attracted our attention, and Matterson, who stood where he could see out of the window, called, "They're coming! Run, Neil, run!"

At that he turned and fled, with the others after him.

I stopped and looked into the girl's gray eyes.

"Come!" I cried, "in heaven's name, make haste!"

I had clean forgotten that the dead man by whom the girl was standing was her father; but her next words, which were spoken from deepest despair, reminded me of it grimly.

"I will not leave him," she said.

"You must!"

"I cannot."

"What," said I, "would he himself have had you do?"

Her determination faltered.

"Come! You cannot do anything more for him! Come."

She shook her head.

"Then I shall stay," I said.

"No," said she, and I saw that there was a change in her manner toward me. "You will go and I—I—"

Then she whistled and cried, "Paul! Paul!"

The great black Fantee servant whom I had seen with her in the canoe on that day when first we met, appeared suddenly.

"Come," she said.

I now saw that Arnold Lamont was running back to the door of the room.

"Quick!" he called. "*Mon dieu,* be quick!"

He stepped aside and let her go through the door first.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE FIGHT AT THE LANDING

As we ran down the footpath, we heard them after us like hounds on the trail, and I tell you, it galled me to run from that cowardly pack. Oh, for one good fight, I thought! For a chance to avenge Seth Upham, who lay miles away beside the spring at the king's grave, to avenge the stern man who had fallen so bravely in front of the mission! For a chance to show the black curs that we would and could meet them, though the odds against us were a hundred to one! A chance to hold our own with them in defiance of their arms and numbers!

The hot pride of youth burned in my cheeks, and I was actually tempted to turn on them there and then; but now I thought of something besides myself, of something besides Seth Upham's rights and my own: I thought of the girl who ran ahead of me so lithely and easily. Be the hazards what they might, be the shame of our retreat ever so great, she must not, while one of us lived, be left to that herd at our heels.

So, running thus in headlong flight, out we came on the river bank.

There was a boat on the river, made fast to a peg on the bank, and there was a long canoe drawn up in the bushes. But at a great distance, where a narrow channel led through the mangroves, we saw titanic waves rolling on the bar in shining cascades from which the sun was brightly reflected, and which, one after another, hurled ton upon ton of water into a welter of foaming whirlpools. And over the lifting crests of the surf we saw, standing off-

shore, the topsails of a brig. The prospect of riding that surf in any boat ever built gave me, I confess without shame, a miserably sick feeling; and as if that were not enough, in through the mangroves to the shore in front of us shot three canoes of the war, and cut us off from the river.

Our time now had come to fight. With blacks behind us and blacks before us, we could no longer double and turn. The river, we knew, was alive with the canoes of the war. Already the black hornets were swarming through the woods and swamps around us. Three times now we had eluded them; this time we must fight. Our guns were lost and only pistols were left. No longer, as in that fatal hut on the king's grave,— in my heart I cursed the bull-headed stupidity of the man who built it and who had paid but a fraction of the price with his own life! — could we hold them at a distance by fear of firearms. Their frenzy by now brooked no such fear. To the brig, whose topsails we could descry miles off shore, we must win our way; there lay our only hope.

I thought of the voice of the wizard — "White man him go Dead Land." Verily to the door of his Dead Land we had come; and it seemed now that we must surely follow Bull and Seth Upham and Bud O'Hara and many another over the threshold.

"Men," said Arnold Lamont,— and his voice, calm, precise, cutting, brought us together,— "stones and clubs are not weapons to be despised in an encounter hand to hand."

"Have into 'em, then!" Gleazen gasped. "All hands together!"

"Mademoiselle," said Arnold, "keep close at our heels."

The girl was beside me now. Her eyes were wide, but her lips were set with a courage that rose above fear. "Come," she cried, and set my heart beating faster than

ever, if it were possible, "they're upon us from the rear!" Then she spoke to her great negro in a language that I had never heard, and came close behind us when we charged down on the blacks ahead.

I fired my pistol and saw that the ball accounted for one of our enemies. I reeled from a glancing blow on the head, which knocked me to my knees; but, rising, I lifted a great rock on the end of a rope, which evidently the girl or her father had used for an anchor,— never negro tied that knot! — and swinging the huge weapon round my head, brought down one assailant with his shoulder and half his ribs broken. Now Arnold fired his pistol; now Matterson pitched, groaning, into the boat. Now, with my bare hand, I parried a spear-thrust and, again swinging my rock, killed a negro in his tracks.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw that the girl had shoved the canoe into the water. She was calling to us eagerly, but neither I nor the others could distinguish her words.

As Gleazen, with an oath, cut the painter of the boat and leaped into her, the impulse of his jump carried her ten feet out from shore; and instantly thrusting out the oars, he started to row away with Matterson and desert us.

"Come back, you yellow cur!" Arnold cried.

The trader, who had fought industriously but to no great purpose, now ran down the bank and, flinging himself full length into the river, caught the stern of the boat, with outstretched fingers, and dragged himself into her, and at the same moment Abe Guptil, obviously with the intention of holding the boat until the rest of us should have a chance to embark, too, not of saving himself, fought his own way aboard and, in spite of violent efforts to lay hands on the oars, was carried, protesting, away.

It is not to be thought that Gleazen had the remotest

notion of saving *our* lives. Having got rid of Arnold and me, he could, as he very well knew, do what he pleased with the brig when once he had silenced Gideon North. But although he had every desire not to help us, he in truth did help us in very spite of himself: no sooner did he appear to be getting safely out into the river, than the blacks, who had us all but at their mercy, suddenly bent every effort to keep him, too, from escaping.

"Let them go! Let them go! Oh, will you not come this way?"

It was the girl again. There was not a drop of cowardly blood in her veins. She, in the bow of the canoe and her big black servant in the stern, held the craft against the bank.

Taking advantage of the momentary respite that we got while the enemy was putting after Gleazen, Arnold and I fairly trembling in our haste — Arnold missed his footing and plunged waist-deep into the river — climbed in after them.

All this, which has taken a long time to tell, happened like so many cracks of the whip. Each event leaped sharply and suddenly at the heels of another, so that it was really but a few seconds — at all events less than a minute — after our arrival at the shore when we found ourselves gliding swiftly and noiselessly through a tiny channel among the mangroves, of which Gleazen had never dreamed. A turn of the paddle carried us out of sight of the struggle behind us, and it now appeared that, once out of sight, we were likewise out of mind.

"Mademoiselle," said Arnold, with a manner at once so deferential and in itself so proud, that it puzzled me more than a little, "shall we not paddle? Permit me to take your place."

"Thank you, no," she said.

"It is not fitting —" he began.

"I know the canoe, the river and the surf," she said. "It is *safer* that I keep the paddle."

And to my surprise, as well as Arnold's, she did keep it and handled it in a way that would have shamed our efforts had we been permitted to try. It was a strange thing in those days, when most women laced tightly, and fainted gracefully if ever occasion required, and played at croquet and battledore and shuttlecock, to see a slender girl swing a paddle with far more than a man's deftness and skill to make up for what she lacked of a man's strength. But though she appeared so slender, so frail, there was that in her bearing which told us that her life in that wild place had given her muscles of steel. The big Fantee, too, drove the long craft ahead with sure, powerful strokes; so we shot out of the mangroves, out of the mouth of the river, into the full glare of the sun.

For a time the sails of the brig had grown small in the distance, but already we saw that she had come about and was standing in again. Why, I wondered, did Gideon North not anchor? Why should he indefinitely stand off and on? How long had he been beating back and forth, and how long would he continue to wait for us if we were not to come? We were long overdue at the meeting-place.

"To think," I said, "that now we can go home to Topham!"

"To Topham?" said Arnold. There was a question in his voice. "I should be surer of going home to Topham if we were rid of Gleazen. Also, my friend, we must ride that surf to the open sea."

The negro in the stern of the canoe now spoke up in gutturals.

"See!" Arnold cried.

Looking back up the river, we saw Gleazen and Abe

Guptil, whom we had outdistanced by our short cut, now rowing madly downstream. Big and heavy though the boat was, they rowed with the strength that precedes despair, and sent her ploughing through the river with a wake such as a cutter might have left. In the stern beside the trader lay Matterson; and though his face, we could see, was streaked with blood, he menaced the negroes upstream with a loaded pistol. Arrows flew, and then a long spear hurtled through the air and struck the bow of the boat. But for all that, they bade fair to get clean away, and none of them appeared aware that we had slipped ahead of them in the race for life.

Now we in the canoe had come to the very edge of the surf, where the surge of the breakers swept past us in waves of foam. Beyond that surf was the open sea, the brig and safety. Behind it were more terrors than we had yet endured. For a moment the canoe hung motionless in the boiling surge; then, taking advantage of the outward flow and guided and driven by the hands of the great negro and the white, slender girl, she shot forward like a living creature, rose on the moving wall of an incoming wave, yielded and for a brief space drew back, then shot ahead once more and passed over the crest just before the wave curled and broke.

I heard a cry from behind us and knew that the others had discovered us ahead of them.

Turning, as we pitched on the heavy seas at a safe distance from the breakers, I watched them, too, row into the surf. I faintly heard Matterson's pistol spit, then I saw Gleazen drive the boat forward, saw her hesitate and swing round, lose way and go over as the next wave broke.

Then we saw them swimming and heard their cries.

As a mere matter of cold justice we should, I am convinced, have left that villainous pair, Matterson and Glea-

zen, to their fate. They had been ready enough to leave us to ours. Their whole career was sown with fraud, cruelty, brazen effrontery, and downright dishonesty. But even Arnold and I could scarcely have borne to do that, for the trader was guiltless enough according to his lights, and Abe Guptil was struggling with them in the water.

The girl, turning and looking back when she heard their shouts, spoke to the great negro in his own language. The canoe came about. Again we paused, waiting for a lull. Then we shot back on the crest of a wave, back down upon the overturned boat, and within gunshot of the flotilla of canoes that were spreading to receive us.

As we passed the wallowing boat I leaned out and caught Gleazen's hands and drew him up to the canoe. The negro cried a hoarse warning, and the canoe herself almost went over; but by as clever use of paddles as ever man achieved, the girl and the negro brought us up on an even keel, and Arnold and I lifted Gleazen aboard, half drowned, and gave a hand to Abe Guptil, who had made out to swim to the canoe. Of Matterson and the trader we saw no sign.

Then Abe, himself but newly rescued, gave a lurch to starboard, and with a clutch at something just under water, was whipped, fiercely struggling to prevent it, clean overboard.

We could neither stop nor turn; either would have been suicide. Would we or would we not, we went past him and left him, and drove on in the wash of the breaking waves down upon the grim line of canoes.

To them we must have seemed a visitation. When I sit alone in the dark I can see again in memory, very clearly, that white girl, her eyes flashing, that great, black Fantee, his bared teeth thrust out between his thick lips. The long breakers were roaring as they swept across the bar

and crashed at slow intervals behind us. In those seething waters the fiercest attack would have been futile; the very tigers of the sea must have lain just beyond the wash of the surf, as did the war. To one who has never seen a Fantee on his native coast, the story that I tell of that wild canoe-ride may seem incredible. It was an appalling, horrifying thing to those of us who were forced passively to endure it, who a dozen times were flung to the very brink of death. And yet every word is true. Though I could scarce draw breath, so swiftly did we escape one danger only to meet another, the big black, trained from childhood to face every peril of the coast, with the white girl paddling in the bow, brought the canoe through the surf and shipped no more than a bucket of water. And then that negro and that slim girl turned in the surge, as coolly as if there were no enemy within a thousand miles, and started back, out again through the surf, to the Adventure.

Were we thus, I thought, to lose Abe Guptil, whom but now we had rescued — good old Abe Guptil, into whose home I had gone long since with the sad news that had forced him to embark with us on Gleazen's mad quest? The thunder of the seas was so loud that I could only wait — no words that I might utter could be heard a hand's-breadth away.

For a moment the canoe hung motionless on the racing waters as a humming bird hangs in the air, then she shot ahead; and up from the sea, directly in her path, came a tangle of bodies. Leaning out, Arnold and I laid hands on Abe and Matterson; and while the negro held the canoe in place, the girl herself reached back and caught that rascal of a trader by the hair. Now tons of water broke around us and the canoe half filled. Now the big negro, by the might of his single paddle, drove us forward. The

wash of water caught us up and carried us on half a cable's length; the negro again fairly lifted us by his great strength; we went in safety over the crest of the next wave, then as we drew the last of the three into the canoe, we began to pitch in the heavy swell of the open sea.

With our backs turned forever on the war, we paddled out to meet the brig. Our great quest had failed. We had left a trail of dead men, plundered goods, and a broken mission. But though all our hopes had gone wrong, though Gleazen had lost all that he sought, there was that in his face as he lay sick and miserable in the canoe which told me that he had other strings for his bow; and when I looked up at the brig, I vowed to myself that I would defend my own property with as much zeal as I would have defended my uncle's.

"See!" Arnold whispered. "Yonder is a strange ship!"

I saw the sail, but I thought little of it at the time. I had grown surprisingly in many ways, but to this very day I have not acquired Arnold Lamont's wonderful power to appraise seemingly insignificant events at their true value.

I only thought of how glad I was to come at last to the shelter of the brig Adventure, how strangely glad I was to have brought off the girl from the mission.

And when we came up under the side of the brig and saw honest Gideon North and all the others on deck looking down at us, the girl let her paddle slide into the water and bent her head on her hands and cried.

VII

THE LONG ROAD HOME

CHAPTER XXX

THE CRUISER

Matterson, Gleazen and the trader, Arnold, Abe and I, and the white girl and her great black servant, all were crowded into a frail dugout, which must long since have foundered, but for the marvelous skill of the big Fantee canoeman and the sureness and steadiness with which the girl had wielded her paddle. And now the girl sat with her face buried in her hands and her shoulders shaking as she sobbed; and the big black, awed and frightened by the nearness and strangeness of the good Adventure, was looking up at the men who had crowded to the rail above him. As the brig came into the wind and lay beside the canoe, her yards sharply counter-braced, the long seas rose to the gunwale of our heavily laden and waterlogged little craft, and she slowly filled and settled.

We should have perished there and then, within an arm's length of the solid planks that promised safety, had not Gideon North acted promptly. As the canoe settled and the water rose, I suddenly found myself swimming, and gave the bottom of the canoe a kick and plunged forward through the water to reach the girl and hold her up. At the same moment, indistinctly through the rush of the waves, I heard Captain North giving orders. Then I saw Abe beside me, swimming on the same errand, and heard someone spluttering and choking behind me; then I came up beside the girl and, seizing one slender wrist, drew her arm over my shoulder and swam slowly by the brig.

There was no excitement or clamor. The canoe, having

emerged half full of water from those vast breakers on the bar, yet having made out to ride the seas well enough until the girl and the negro stopped paddling, had then quietly submerged and left us all at once struggling in the ocean.

Blocks creaked above us and oars splashed, and suddenly I felt the girl lifted from my shoulders; then I myself was dragged into a boat. Thus, after ten days on the continent of Africa, ten such days of suffering and danger that they were to live always as terrible nightmares in the memory of those of us who survived them, we came home to the swift vessel that had belonged to poor Seth Upham.

To the story that we told, first one talking, then another, all of us excited and all of us, except Arnold Lamont, who never lost his calm precision and the girl who did not speak at all, fairly incoherent with emotion, Gideon North replied scarcely a word.

"The black beasts!" Gleazen cried in a voice that shook with rage. "I 'd give my last chance of salvation to send a broadside among them yonder."

"Ah, that 's no great price," Matterson murmured sourly. "I'd give more than that — many times more, my friend. Think you, Captain North, that a man of spirit would soon forget or forgive such a token as this?" And he pointed at the raw wound the spear had left on his face.

Gleazen stepped close beside him. "Hm! It's sloughing," he said.

"It's hot and it throbs like the devil," Matterson replied.

Arnold also came over to Matterson and looked at the wound.

"It needs attention," he commented. "It certainly is not healing as it should."

Matterson raised his brows angrily. "Let it be," he returned.

With a slight lift of his head, Arnold faced about and walked slowly away.

As Matterson angrily glared from one of us to another, the group separated and, turning, I saw our guest standing silently apart.

"Captain North," I said slowly, "this lady —"

He did not wait for me to finish.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," he cried. "You shall have my own stateroom. I should have spoken before, but that sail troubles me."

Thereupon others turned to study the sail, which was bearing down on us, although still some miles away; but I continued to watch the guest whose presence there in the Adventure seemed so strange as almost to savor of magic, as she tried to thank Gideon North.

"Don't say a word," he cried. "Not a word! Remember this: I've a wife and daughters of my own, and I wish they were on board to make things comfortable for you. But all we can do, I'm afraid, is give you a chance to make yourself comfortable. Our cabin boy's gone. He went ashore with those damnable villains yonder and never came back."

"A little boy?" she suddenly asked.

"Aye."

"A wicked little rascal?" A strangely roguish light flashed across her face and she smiled as if in spite of herself.

Gideon North's chuckle grew into a wide grin. "Ma'am, that's Willie MacDougald to a T. But what do you know of him?"

"He ran away from them, and came to us when they had gone up-river, and said that they were going to beat

him, and told a terrible story of the wrongs he had suffered. But he could not abide our ways any more than we his,— such a time as he led us with his swearing and thieving and lying! — and when a boat from the American cruiser came ashore while you were gone, he told the men such a story of your search for slaves and of all your gear and goods, they vowed to capture you if they lay off the coast a year and a day, and they laughed at his wretched oaths and made much of him and took him on board. And then — then —" It seemed the thought of all that had happened since swept upon her in a wave almost as overwhelming as one of those breakers through which we had fought our way; for she suddenly turned white and tried to fight back her tears, and for the time could speak no more.

"Come, Joe, look alive now!" Captain North roared, trying to mask his kind heart and lively emotions with a pretense of fierceness. "Fetch hot water from the galley to my stateroom! Have the cook bring aft hot coffee and a square meal. I'll take you below myself, ma'am, to show you the way, and I now order you to help yourself to all you need for comfort. Off with you, Joe!"

All this time the cook had been gaping from the galley door at what had been going on aft; and so eager was he to get a nearer view of the young lady who had come mysteriously out with us from the river, and to gather up new threads of the extraordinary story Abe Guptil had told forward, that, although he was the laziest Yankee who ever commanded a galley stove, he set out at a dead run aft, with a coffee-pot in one hand and a pail of hot water, which at every moment threatened to spill and scald him, in the other.

Captain North at once came on deck again and found the rest of us still intent on the approaching ship, which

with all her canvas spread was bearing down upon us like a race-horse. The cook, on his way forward, paused to survey her. The watch, now glancing anxiously aft, now studying the stranger, was standing by for whatever orders should be forthcoming.

"Sir," said Arnold, "she means trouble."

"We've waited too long already," Captain North replied. Raising the trumpet he cried, "Call up all hands, there, Mr. Severance!"

A moment later he looked keenly at Matterson. "Mr. Matterson," he said, "you are exhausted."

"I *am* a little peaked," Matterson said thoughtfully, "a little peaked, but not exhausted."

"Will you take your station, sir?"

"I will." Still in his wet clothes and cautiously touching his inflamed wound, Matterson went forward to the forecastle. There was something soldierly in his promptness. It was so evident that his strength was scarcely equal to his task, that for his hardihood, little as I liked him, I freely gave him credit.

"Mr. Gleazen," said Captain North, "I am afraid we must show her our heels."

"If I could lay my hands on the lean neck of William MacDougald," Gleazen growled, "I'd wring his head clean off."

"She unquestionably is bearing down on us."

"She is."

"And she knows —"

"She knows," cried Gleazen, "all that Willie MacDougald can tell her of casks and farina and shackles and lumber for extra decks."

"And of false papers with which you so carefully provided yourself?"

Gideon North's face all this time was as sober as a

judge's, but now I saw that he was deliberately tormenting Gleazen with the various preparations the man had made for that unholy traffic in slaves.

Although Gleazen himself by now perceived it, his wrath turned on our erstwhile cabin boy rather than on Gideon North. He swore vilely. "Aye," he cried, "we must run — run or hang. And all for the word of a prying, cursing, eavesdropping young rooster that I might have wrung the neck of, any day for months past. If ever I lay hands on his ape's throat —"

"I gather, sir," Captain North dryly interposed, "you'll use him harshly."

With that he turned his back on Gleazen and raised his trumpet: —

"Lay aloft and loose the main to'g'l'ants'l. — Man the to'g'lant sheets and halyards. — Some of you men, there, stand by the clewl'nes and braces." For a moment he stood, trumpet at lips, watching every motion of the men; then, as those on the yards loosened the sail, he thundered, "Let fall! — Lay in! — Sheet home!" Then, "Hoist away! — Belay the halyards!"

As we crowded on sail, the brig leaned before the wind, and for a time we hoped that we were gaining on the stranger; but our hopes were soon dispelled.

It seemed queer to run from our own countrymen, but run we did all that afternoon, through the bluest of blue seas, with white clouds flying overhead and low lands on the horizon.

In another sense I could not help feeling that Gideon North himself showed quite too little anxiety about the outcome of the race. Yet, as time passed, even his face grew more serious, and all that afternoon, as we braced the yards and so made or shortened sail as best to maintain our speed at every change of wind, an anxious group

watched from the quarter-deck of the Adventure the swift vessel that stood after us and slowly gained on us, with her canvas spread till she looked on the blue sea for all the world like a silver cloud racing in the blue sky.

The nearer she came, the graver grew the faces about me; for, if the full penalty of the law was exacted, to be convicted as a slaver in those days was to be hanged, and in all the world there was no place where a vessel and her men were so sure to be suspected of slaving as in the very waters where we were then sailing. The track of vessels outward bound from America to Good Hope and the Far East ran in general from somewhere about the Cape Verde Islands to the southeastern coast of Brazil; that of vessels homeward bound, from Good Hope northwest past St. Helena and across the Equator. Thus the western coast of Africa formed, with those two lines that vessels followed, a rough triangle; and looking toward the apex, where the two converged, it served as the base. In that triangle of seas, as blue as sapphire and as clear, occurred horrors such as all human history elsewhere can scarcely equal. There a slaver would leave the lanes of commerce, run up to the coast one night, and be gone the next with a cargo of "ebony" under her hatches, to mingle with the ships inward or outward bound; and there the cruisers hunted.

The faces of the crew were sober as the man-of-war, cracking on every stitch of canvas, came slowly up to us at the end of the afternoon. We all knew then that even to keep a safe lead until sunset, it would do us precious little good; for in a clear starlight night our pursuer could follow us almost as well as by day. Arnold Lamont was inscrutable; Gideon North was gravely silent; Matterson and Gleazen were angry and sullen; and the luckless trader, who had escaped from his ambushed caravan only to find himself in a doomed vessel, was yellow with fear.

There was not a man, forward or aft, who did not know the incalculable stakes for which we were racing. Pedro with his monkey on and off his shoulder as he worked, Abe Guptil with his nervous, eager step, and all the others, each showing the strain after his own manner, leaped to the ropes at the word of command or fidgeted about the decks in the occasional moments of inaction.

Of our passenger I had thought often and with ever keener anxiety. How the fast-approaching end of our race would affect her future I could only guess, and really I was more anxious for her than for myself. But from the moment she went below neither I nor any of the others saw sign or glimpse of her, until, just at sunset, I ran thither to fetch the leather-bound spyglass whose lower power and greater illumination lent itself best to night work.

As I clattered down the companionway, I heard someone dart out of the cabin. But when I entered, the girl, as if she had been waiting to see who it was, came back again, so eager for news from above that she could no longer remain in hiding.

"Tell me, sir," she said, lifting her head proudly, "has the cruiser overhauled us yet?"

"Not yet," I replied.

She stood as if waiting for whatever else I had to say; but my tongue for the moment was tied.

"If they do?" she said as if to question me.

"Heaven help us!"

"Come," she cried with some asperity, "don't stand there staring like a gaby! Tell me everything. Have not I a right to know?"

"If you wish," I replied, stung by the scorn in her voice. "The chances are that, if we are caught, some of us will hang. Which of us and how many, is a debatable question."

She thought it over calmly. "That is probably true. I

think, however, that I shall have something to say about which ones will hang."

That was a phase of the matter which had not occurred to me. It gave me a good deal of relief, until I met her eyes regarding me still scornfully, and realized what an exhibition of myself I was making. I had been assertive enough hitherto, and I had not lacked confidence where females were concerned; I remembered well the one who so long before had come into my uncle's store in Topham, and how Arnold had smiled at the scorn that I had accorded her. But this young lady somehow was different. She had a fine, quiet dignity that seemed always to appraise me with cool precision. She had shown, once at least, a flash of humor that indicated how lightly, in less tragic circumstances, she could take light things. Now and then she had dealt a keen thrust that cut me by its truth.

And yet she treated me kindly enough, too. She had seemed almost glad to have me at her side when we ran together from the mission.

"Mistress—" I began; then stopped and clumsily stammered, "I — I don't know your name."

"My name?" With the hint of a smile, but with that fine dignity which made me feel my awkwardness many times over, she said, "I am Faith Parmenter."

Another pause followed, which embarrassed me still more; then, awkwardly, I reached for the night glass. Things were not happening at all as I had dreamed.

"You're long enough finding that glass," Captain North growled when I handed it to him. "Aye, and red in the face, too."

I was thankful indeed that the approach of the ship, which had sailed so swiftly as to overhaul even our Baltimore brig, gave him other things to think about.

By now the race was almost over. I heard Gleazen

talking of bail — of judges — of bribes. I saw the man Pedro twitching his fingers at his throat. I saw Arnold Lamont and Gideon North watching the stranger intently, minute after minute. Taking in our studding-sails and royals, we braced sharp by the wind with our head to westward. At that our pursuer, which had come up almost abreast of us but a mile away, followed our example, sail for sail and point for point, whereupon we hauled up our courses, took in topgallant sails and jib, and tacked.

When the stranger followed our manœuvre, but with the same sail that she had been carrying, she came near enough for us to see that her lower-deck ports were triced up. When we tacked offshore again, she hauled up her mizzen staysail and stood for us; and fifteen minutes later she hauled her jib down, braced her headsails to the mast, and rounded to about half a cable's length to the windward of us on our weather quarter. We had already heard the roll of drums beating the men to their stations, and now Captain North, his glass leveled at her in the half light, cried gloomily:—

"Aye, the tompions are out of her guns already!"

"Ship ahoy!" came the deep hail. "What ship is that?"

"Train your guns, Captain North!" Gleazen cried fiercely; "train your guns!"

"Mr. Gleazen," Gideon North retorted, with a stern smile, "with one broadside she can blow us into splinters. Our shot would no more than rattle on her planks."

"Ahoy there!" the deep voice roared, now angrily.

"The brig Adventure from Boston, bound on a legitimate trading voyage to the Guinea coast," Captain North replied. "Where are you from?"

To his question they returned no answer. The curt order that the speaking-trumpet sent out to us was:—

"Stand by! We're sending a boat aboard."

We were caught by a cruiser, and there was evidence below that would send us, guilty and guiltless alike, to the very gallows if the courts should impose on us the extreme penalty.

Up to this point we had not been certain of the nationality of our pursuers. Too often flags were used to suit the purpose of the moment. But there was now no doubt that the uniforms in the boat were those of our own countrymen.

With long, hasty strides, Gleazen crossed the deck to the captain. In his face defiance and despair were strangely mingled. He was nervously working his hands. "Quick now," he cried. "Haul down the flag, Captain North. Break out the red and yellow. Throw over the papers. Over with them, quick!"

"I am not sure I wish to change my registry," Gideon North quietly returned.

Gleazen swore furiously. "You'll hang with the rest of us," he cried.

"I think, sir, that I can *prove my* innocence."

"The casks and shackles will knot the rope round your stiff neck. Aye, Captain North, you'll have a merry time of it, twitching your toes against the sunrise."

In fury Gleazen spun on his heel. For once, as his teeth pulled shreds of skin from his lips, the man was stark white.

We heard the creak of blocks as the ship lowered her boat, heard the splash of oars as the boat came forging toward us, saw in the stern the bright bars of a lieutenant's uniform.

There was not one of us who did not feel keenly the suspense. So surely as the boat came aboard, just so surely would the searchers, primed for their task, no doubt, by that vengeful little wretch, MacDougald, find whatever

damning evidence was stowed in the hold; and I was by no means certain that, in the cold light of open court, we who had fought against every suggestion of illegal traffic could prove our innocence. But to Gleazen and Matterson the boat promised more than search and seizure. Whether or not the rest of us effected our acquittal, for those two a long term in prison was the least that they could expect, and the alternative caused even Gleazen's nonchalance to fail him. It is one thing, and a very creditable thing, to face without fear the prospect of an honest death in a fair fight; it is quite another, calmly to anticipate hanging.

Still Gleazen stood there in the fleeting twilight, opening and closing his hands in indecision. Still Captain North waited with folded arms, determined at any cost to have the truth and the truth only told on board his brig.

The brig slowly rose, and fell, and rose, on the long seas. The men stood singly and in little groups, waiting, breathless with apprehension, for whatever was to happen. A cable's length away, the cruising man-of-war, her ports triced up, her guns run out and trained, rolled on the long seas in time with the brig. We had thought, when we escaped from the enfolding attack of the African war, that all danger was over. Now, it seemed, we must face a new danger, which menaced not only our lives, but our honor.

The boat now lay bumping under the gangway.

"Come, pass us a line!" the lieutenant cried.

Suddenly Gleazen woke from his indecision. Stepping boldly to the rail, he called down in his big, gruff, assertive voice: —

"You men had better not come on board. Mind you, I've given you fair warning."

"What's that you're saying?"

"You better not come on board. We've got four cases

of smallpox already, and two more that I think are coming down."

The men in the boat instantly shoved off, and a dozen feet away sat talking in low voices. Obviously they were undecided what to do.

To most of us Gleazen's cool, authoritative statement, that the most dread plague of the African coast, the terror alike of traders, cruisers, and slavers, had appeared among us — a downright lie — was so amazing that we scarcely knew what to make of it. I must confess that, little as I liked the means that he took, I was well pleased at the prospect of his gaining his end. But Gideon North, as he had been prompt to shatter at the start Gleazen's first attempt at fraud, promptly and unexpectedly thrust his oar into this one.

"That, gentlemen, is not so," he called down to the boat. "We have as clean a bill of health as any ship in the service."

"Come, come, now," cried the young officer. "What's all this?"

"I'm telling you the truth, and I'm master of this brig."

With his hands at his mouth Gleazen, half-pretending to whisper, called, "We're humoring him. He won't admit he has it. But what I've told you is God's honest truth."

Captain North started as if about to speak, then seemed to think better of it. Folding his arms, he let the matter stand

I think he, as much as any of the rest of us, was relieved when the boat, after hesitating a long time, during which we suffered keenest anxiety, made about and returned to the ship. Still we dared not breathe easily, lest the commanding officer, refusing to accept his subordinate's report, order a search at all costs. But five minutes later it

appeared that, whatever their suspicions may have been, they had no intention of running needless risks, for they came about and made off up the coast.

Small wonder that they acted thus! The bravest of captains must have stopped three times to think before ordering his men to dare that terrible disease, the worst scourge of those seas, the terror alike of slavers and cruisers, on the bare word of such as Willie MacDougald that he would find contraband.

I have often wondered whether Willie MacDougald was on board the ship, and whether he was responsible for the chase. In the light of all that I heard, I rather think he was, although none of us who searched the decks of the other vessel caught so much as a glimpse of him. But if so, it must have disappointed him deeply that his revenge failed to reach Cornelius Gleazen and Pedro's monkey; and seeing the monkey, which had eluded its owner and strayed aft, perched in the rigging and malevolently eyeing Gleazen himself, I laughed aloud.

Then I saw that it was no time for laughing, for Gleazen and Gideon North were standing grimly face to face, and Arnold and Matterson and the trader were gathering close around them.

Out of the rumble of angry voices, one came to me more distinctly than any of the others: —

"Mr. Gleazen, it is time that we settled this question once and for all. If you will come below with me, we can reach, I am sure, a decision that will be best for all of us in the Adventure."

It was Captain North who spoke. As he moved toward the companionway, I saw that Arnold Lamont was beckoning to me.

CHAPTER XXXI

A PASSAGE AT ARMS

Across the cabin table was spread the big, inaccurate chart of the west coast of Africa, on which Captain North had penciled the rat-infested island and the river.

Seeing it now for the first time since he had returned to the brig, Gleazen planted one finger on the picture of the spot where we had found the wrecked ship with the bones of the drowned slaves still chained to her timbers. "Pfaw!" he growled. "If only *she* was afloat! There was a ship for you! Given her at sea again, handsome and handy, two good men would never 'a' lost their lives. Given that she was not beyond repair, and we might yet kedge her off and plank her and caulk her and rig her anew."

"She's done," said Matterson languidly. "Forget her." He laid his head on the table and closed his eyes.

"Molly!" There was a new note of concern in Gleazen's voice. He leaned over and shook the man.

"Let me be," said Matterson.

"Gentlemen," Gideon North interposed, "we are dodging the issue."

"Well?" Gleazen angrily raised his head. "There is no issue. We'll sail for the Rio Pongo, lay off and on till the first dark night, then take the cargo that a friend of ours will have ready. Thence, Captain North, we'll sail for Cuba. *I'll* give the orders now, and *you'll* carry them out."

"How long," I cried hotly, "have you been giving orders on board this vessel?"

He turned and glared at me. "If you want facts, Joe,

I'll give them to you: I've been giving orders aboard this vessel from the day we sailed from Boston until now — aye, and seeing that they were obeyed, too, you young cub. But if you want fancies, such as are suitable for the young, I've owned the brig only since Seth Upham went mad and got himself killed."

"You own the brig?"

"Yes, I own the brig."

"You lie!"

That he merely laughed, enraged me more than if he had hit me.

"You lie!" I repeated.

"Next," said he, "you'll be telling me that Seth Upham owned her."

"That I will, indeed, and it is a small part of what I'll be telling you."

"Well, he did n't."

The man's effrontery left me without words to retort.

"He did n't," Gleazen said again. "Him and I went into this deal share alike. Half to him and half to me and my partners. Ain't he dead? Well, then I keep my half and Molly, here, who is all the partner I've got left now, gets the other half. Ain't that plain? Of course it is. It would be plain enough if we'd got clear with the fortune that was ours by rights. And because we lost the fortune, it's all the plainer that we ought to get something for our trouble."

"But, Mr. Gleazen," Arnold interposed, "supposing there were a grain of truth in what you say,— which there is n't,— the rest of us, Joe and Abe and I, still have a sixth part in it all."

"That," cried Matterson, bursting into the controversy before Gleazen could find words to meet this new argument, "that is stuff. The sixth part was to come out

of Seth Upham's lay; and Seth Upham is dead, so he gets no lay. Therefore you get not a bit more than the wages you signed on for; and if you signed on for no wages, you get nothing."

"I can promise you, Matterson," Gideon North said with a smile, "that nothing of that kind goes down under my command."

"Then you're likely not to keep your command."

The trader, glancing shrewdly from one to another, had edged over beside Gleazen, but now Arnold spoke, as ever, calmly and precisely: —

"Let all that go. About that we do not as yet care. It is a matter to be argued when the time comes. But — what will you take on board for a cargo at Rio Pongo?"

As if Arnold's question implied permission for him also to have his say, the trader spread both hands in a gesture of despair at such ignorance as it manifested.

"'What weel you get?' Ah, me —"

"Yes, what will you get?" Arnold reiterated, quietly smiling at the irony of his question.

"We'll get a cargo all right when we get there," Gleazen asserted. "We'll let it go at that. Captain North, bring the brig about on a course, say, of approximately west by north." He bent over the chart. "That will be about right. As for the wind —"

"Captain North," said I, "you will do nothing of the kind. Unless we can get an honest cargo, you will head straight back to Boston and sell the Adventure for what she'll bring."

"'What weel you get?'" the still amazed trader cried again. "You weel get —"

"As for you, Joe,—" Gleazen momentarily drowned out the man's voice,— "you'll get into trouble if you're not careful."

"For you, Mr. Gleazen, I don't care the snap of my finger. I'll have my property handled in the way I choose."

For a moment Gleazen glared at me in angry silence, and in that moment, the trader found opportunity to finish his sentence, which he did with an air of such pleasure in the tidings he gave, and all the time so completely unconscious of the subtler undercurrents of our quarrel, that to an unprejudiced observer it would have been ludicrous in the extreme.

"You weel get — *niggers!* Such prime, stout, strong niggers! It ees a pleasure always to buy niggers at Rio Pongo. Such barracoons! Such niggers!"

Although for a long time we had very well known the hidden real object of Gleazen's return to Topham and of the mad quest on which he had led us, this was the first time that anyone had frankly put it into so many words. The anger and defiance with which our two parties eyed each other seemed moment by moment to grow more intense.

"Well, there's no need to look so glum about it," said Gleazen at last. "Half the deacons in New England live on the proceeds of rum and notions, and they know well enough what trade their goods are sold in. You may talk all you will of the gospel; they take their dollars, when their ships come home. Your Englishman may talk of his cruisers on the coast and his laws that Parliament made for him; but when the bills come back on London for his Birmingham muskets and Liverpool lead and Manchester cotton, he don't cry bad money and turn 'em down. Why, then, should we? Where there's niggers, there'll be slaves. It's in the blood of them."

"Be that as it may," I retorted, "not a slave shall board this vessel."

"It appears," Gleazen slowly returned, "that this brig, which is a small craft at best, is not big enough for both of us."

"Not if you think you can give yourself the airs of an owner."

"Hear that, you! 'Airs of an owner!' Well, I am owner. I think — yes, I will give you a greater honor than you deserve." Suddenly he leaned over and roared at me, "Get down on your knees and apologize, or, so help me, I'll strike you dead on the spot."

Quicker than a flash I reached out and slapped him on the face — and as I did so I remembered the time when O'Hara had slapped Seth Upham.

With his hand half drawn back as if to seize a chair for a cudgel, he stopped, smiled, spun round and reached for the pair of swords on the bulkhead. Extending the two hilts, he smiled and said, "I shall take pleasure in running you through, my friend."

"Not so fast!" It was Arnold who spoke. "I, sir, will take first a turn at the swords with you."

"*In* your turn, Mr. Lamont," Gleazen retorted with an exaggerated bow. "Meanwhile, if you please, you may act as second to Mr. Woods."

"Come, enough of this nonsense," cried honest Gideon North, "or I'll clap you both into irons. Dueling aboard my vessel, indeed!" He looked appraisingly from one of us to the other.

"I will fight him," I coolly replied.

"You will, will you?"

"I will."

Soberly Gideon North looked me in the eye. Already Gleazen, Matterson, Arnold, and the others were moving toward the companionway. This happened, you must remember, in '27; dueling was not regarded then as it is now.

"I am afraid, my boy, it will not be a fair fight."

"It will be fair enough," I replied.

Rising, Captain North brought out his medicine chest.

I followed the others on deck, as if the little world in which I was moving were a world of unreality. All that I knew of swordsmanship, I had learned from Cornelius Gleazen himself; and though I felt that at the end of our lessons I had learned enough to give him a hard fight, it was quite another matter to cross swords that carried no buttons, and to believe that one of us was to die.

There was only starlight on deck, and Captain North stepped briskly forward to Arnold and Matterson, who were standing together by a clear space that they had paced off.

"Gentlemen," said he, "if they were to wait until morning —"

"There would be more light, to be sure," Arnold returned, "but the disadvantage is common to both."

Gleazen grumbled something far down in his throat, and I cried out that I would fight him then as well as any time.

"If a couple of lanterns were slung from the rigging," Matterson suggested. He moved slowly and now and then touched the hot skin around his wound; but although it still troubled him, he appeared to be gaining strength.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when two men came running aft in response to Captain North's sharp order. Lanterns were lighted and slung, and Cornelius Gleazen and I, with sword in hand, faced each other across a length of clean white deck.

It was a long way from friendly combat on the village green at Topham to the bout I now waited to begin, and both for Cornelius Gleazen and for myself the intervening

months had piled up a formidable score to be settled. Waiting in silence for our seconds, Arnold and Matterson, to clear away some coiled ropes, we watched each other with a bitter hate that had been growing on his part, I am convinced, since the days when first he had seen me working in my uncle's store, and on mine, certainly, ever since I had become aware of the growing conviction that the friendship he had so loudly professed for me was absolutely insincere.

He had cheated, robbed, browbeaten, and, to all practical ends, killed, my uncle. He stood there now, scheming by every means in his power to kill and rob me in my turn. And if he succeeded! — I thought of the girl to whom Gideon North had given up his stateroom. How much did she know of all that was going forward? There had been only one door between her and the quarrel in the cabin. And what fate would be left for her, if I should fall — if Gleazen should override Gideon North and Arnold Lamont? Truly, I thought, I must fight my best.

"And, sir," I heard Arnold saying, "if you are able to bear arms after your bout with Mr. Woods, it is to be my turn and you shall so favor me."

"That I will," Gleazen replied with a wry smile.

I know truly, although I do not understand the reason for it, that after an unusually dramatic experience it is likely to be some trifling, irrelevant little thing that one remembers most vividly. And singularly enough it is a tiny patch on Arnold's coat that I now most clearly recall of all that happened then. I noticed it for the first time when Arnold was speaking; I do not remember that I ever noticed it again. Yet to this day I can see it as clearly as if I had only to turn my head to find it once more before my eyes, slightly darker than the body of the coat and sewed on with small neat stitches.

Now Arnold was beside me. "Steady your blade, my boy," he said. "Fence lightly and cautiously."

The two swords circled, flashing in the lantern-light, and we came on guard in a duel such as few men have fought. The rolling deck at best gave us unsteady footing. As the lantern swung, the shadows changed in a way that was most confusing. Now we were all but in darkness; now the light was fairly in our eyes.

This, I thought, can never be the old Neil Gleazen with whom I used to fence. He was craftier, warier, more cautious now than I had ever seen him, and I took a lesson from him and restrained the impetuousness of the attack I should have launched had foils been our weapons. Now he lunged out like a flash, and all but came in past my guard. I instantly replied by a riposte, but failed to catch him napping. Again he lunged and yet again, and for the third time I succeeded in parrying, but all to no purpose so far as opening the way for a counter-attack was concerned.

Now I saw the spectators only as black shadows standing just out of the range of my vision. With every sense I was alert to parry and lunge. Now it seemed very dark except for the light of the lanterns, although before we began to fence, the starlight had seemed uncommonly bright and clear. The whole world appeared to grow dark around me as I fought, until only Cornelius Gleazen was to be seen, as if in the heart of a light cloud. Now I all but eluded his guard. Now I drew blood from his arm — I was convinced of it. I pressed him closer and closer and got new confidence from seeing that he was breathing harder than I.

For a moment,— it is a thing that happens when one has concentrated his whole attention on a certain object for so long a time that at last it inevitably wavers,— for

a moment I was aware of those around me as well as of the man in front of me. I even heard their hard breathing, their whispered encouragement. I saw that Matterson was standing on my right, midway between me and Gleazen. I saw a sudden opening, and thrusting out my arm, drove my blade for it with all the speed and strength of my body. That thrust, too, drew blood; there was no doubt of it, for Gleazen gave a quick gasp and let his guard fall. Victory was mine; I had beaten him. My heart leaped, and lifting my sword-hand to turn off his blade, I attempted a reprise. I knew by the frantic jerk of Gleazen's guard that he was aware that I had beaten him. I was absolutely sure of myself. But when I attempted to spring back and launch the doubled attack something held my foot.

I gave a quick jerk,— *literally my foot was held,*— I lost my balance and all but went over. Then I felt a burning in the back of my shoulder and sat down on deck with the feeling that the lanterns were now expanding into strange wide circles of light, now concentrating into tiny coals of fire.

First I knew that Gideon North was bending over me with his medicine chest; then I took a big swallow of brandy and had hard work to keep from choking over it; then I felt cool hands, so firm and small that I knew they could belong to only one person in the Adventure; then I saw Arnold Lamont, sword in hand, facing Cornelius Gleazen.

Now why, I wondered, had I been unable to withdraw my foot. Matterson had been all but in my way. He must have thrust out his own foot!

"Arnold," I cried incoherently, "beware of Matterson! He tripped me!"

Arnold looked down at me and smiled and nodded.

"Sir," I heard him saying, as if miles away, "you have beaten a man years younger than yourself by a foul and treacherous trick. I shall kill you."

"Kill me?" Gleazen arrogantly roared. "It would take a swordsman to do it."

To that Arnold replied in a foreign tongue, which even then I knew must be Spanish. I was no competent witness of what was taking place; but cloudy though my mind was, I did not fail to see that Arnold's taunt struck home, for both Gleazen and Matterson angrily swore.

"In Spanish, eh?" Gleazen sneered. "So this is the leaky spigot! No more tales, my fine fellow, shall trickle out through your round mouth, once I have measured your vitals with cold steel."

Into my spinning brain there now came a sudden memory of my bout with Arnold long, long ago, when I had gone at him just as arrogantly as ever Neil Gleazen was doing now. I tried to cry out again and could not. I laughed, which was all my strength permitted, and wearily leaned back, and through eyes that would almost close in spite of me, saw Arnold advance under the swinging lantern so swiftly that his sword was like a beam of light flashed by a mirror.

His blade sped through Gleazen's guard: Gleazen dropped his sword, staggered, and fell with a crash.

I heard Arnold say, "Sir, I am more clumsy than I knew. The rolling deck has saved your miserable life, since I cannot kill a wounded man. But if my hand were in practice, no ship that ever rolled would have turned that thrust."

Then a great uproar ensued, and I knew nothing more until I opened my eyes in the cabin, where a hot argument was evidently in progress, since oaths were bandied back and forth and there were hard words on all sides.

"As representatives of Josiah Woods, who owns this brig," I heard Arnold say, "Gideon North and I will not permit you, sir, or any other man, to ship such a cargo."

The reply I did not understand, but I again heard Arnold's voice, hot with anger.

"We will *not* sail again to that den of pirates and slavers and the iniquitous of all the nations of the world, Havana. If you do not wish to go to Boston,—" he hesitated,— "we will use you better than you deserve. For a profitable voyage, we might compromise, say, on South America."

Of what followed I have no memory, for I was weaker than I realized, from loss of blood. The cabin went white before my eyes. The voices all dwindled away to remote threads of sound. I seemed to feel myself sway with the motion of the ship, and opened my eyes again and saw that I was being carried. Then I once more felt cool hands on my forehead, and leaning back, seemed to sink into endless space. I forgot Topham and all that had happened there; I forgot Africa and every event of our ill-fated venture; I even forgot the brig and the duel, and I almost forgot my own identity. But as I existed in a sort of dreamland or fairyland somewhere between waking and sleeping, I did not forget the girl who had come with me out of Africa; and even when I could not remember my own name, I would find myself struggling in a curiously detached way to connect the name Faith, which persisted in my memory, with a personality that likewise persisted, yet that seemed a thing apart from all the world and not even to be given a name.

CHAPTER XXXII

WESTWARD BOUND

At the time I did not know whether it was two days or ten that I lay in that borderland of consciousness. But as I emerged from it into a clearer, more real world, I saw now the girl, now Arnold, now Gideon North, passing before me and sometimes pausing by my berth. One day I found myself eating broth that someone was feeding to me. The next, I saw that the girl was my nurse. The next, I asked questions, but so weakly that I could no more than murmur a faint protest when she smiled and turned away without answering.

So it went until a time when my voice was stronger and I would not be put off again. Seizing her sleeve and feebly holding it, I cried as stoutly as I was able, "Tell me — tell me where we are and all that has happened."

What she saw through the open port, I could only guess; if it was possible to judge by her face, she saw more than mere sea and sky, with perhaps a wandering sea bird; but she turned and quietly said, "We are at sea, now, and all is going well, and when you are stronger, I'll tell you more."

"Tell me now!" I demanded.

I would have said more, but I felt that my voice was failing and I did not wish her to perceive it.

She hesitated, then impulsively turned.

"Just this: you are getting well fast, and he is getting well slowly. We have gone from the coast and the Gulf of Guinea, and are off for South America."

Then she went away and left me, and I was troubled by

the sadness of her face, although she had had enough, heaven knew! to make her sad.

"So," I thought, "we have really abandoned the trade at last! And so Arnold brought down Gleazen! And what of the trader and Pedro? And what are our prospects of profit from a voyage to South America? And what of Seth Upham and —"

Then it all came back to me, a thousand memories bursting all at once upon my bewildered brain, and I lived again those days from the hour when I first saw Neil Gleazen on the porch of the inn, through the mad night when we left Topham behind us, through the terrible seasickness of my first voyage, through the sinister adventure in Havana, through all the uncanny warnings of those African witch doctors, up to the very hour when Seth Upham threw wide his arms and went, singing, down to die by the spring. I remembered our wild flight, the battle in the forest, the race down the river, the fall of the mission, and again our flight,— the girl was with us now! — the affair of the cruiser, the quarrel, the duel, and the voices that I heard as I lay on deck. Then I came to a black hiatus. Memory carried me no further and I wearily closed my eyes, having no strength to keep them open longer.

Next I knew that good Gideon North was standing over me, his hand on my pulse; there was a sharp throbbing pain in my shoulder where Gleazen's sword had struck home; I was vaguely aware that the girl was sobbing.

Now why, I thought, should anything trouble her? It was not as if she, like me, had come up against a wall that she could not pass. I seemed actually to throw myself at that black rigid barrier which cut me off from every event that followed and — my delirious metaphors were sadly mixed — left me balanced precariously on a tenuous col-

umn of memories that came to an end high up in a dark open place, like the truck of a ship in a black, stormy night.

I heard Gideon North speaking of fever and my wound; then the picture changed and the girl alone was sitting beside me. She was singing in a low voice, and the song soothed me. I did not try to follow the words; I simply let the tune lead me whither it would. Then I went to sleep again, and when I woke my memory had succeeded in passing the barrier that before had balked every effort.

Now I remembered things that had happened while I lay in my berth in my stateroom. I put together things that had happened before and after my duel. It was as if I reached out from my frail mast of memories and found accustomed ropes and knew that I could go elsewhere at will. I felt a sudden new confidence in my power to think and speak, and when the girl once more appeared, I cried out eagerly, even strongly, "Now I know what, who, and where I am."

At my words she stepped quickly forward and laid her hand on my forehead. The fever had gone. With a little cry she turned, and I heard her say to someone in the cabin, "His face is as cool as my own!"

In came Gideon North, then, and in the door appeared Arnold.

"Bless me, boy!" Captain North cried, "you're on the mend at last."

"I think I am," I returned. "What happened to me?"

"Happened to you? A touch of African fever, my lad, on top of a dastardly stab."

"Where's Neil Gleazen?" I cried.

"Oh, he's getting along better than he deserves. Our friend Lamont, here, spitted him delicately; but he escaped the fever and has had an easier time of it by far than you, my lad."

He once more counted my pulse. "Fine," he said in his heartiest voice, "fine enough. Now turn over and rest."

"But I've been resting for days and days," I protested. "I want to talk now and hear all the news."

"Not now, Joe. We'll go away and leave you now. But I'll have cook wring the neck of another chicken and give your nurse, here, the meat. She has a better hand at broth, Joe, my boy, than ever a man-cook had, and I'll warrant, two hours from now, broth'll taste good to you."

So I went to sleep and woke to a saner, happier world.

In another week I was able to be up on deck and to lie in the open air on cushions and blankets, where the warm sunshine and the fair wind and the gentle motion of the sea combined to soothe and restore me. It was good to talk with Arnold and Captain North, and with Abe Guptil, who, at my request, was ordered aft to spend an hour with me one afternoon; but why, I wondered, did I see so little now of Faith Parmenter?

She would nod at me with a smile and a word, and then go away, perhaps to lean on the rail and watch for an hour at a time the rolling blue sea, or to pace the deck as if oblivious to all about her.

On that night at the mission weeks before, when neither of us even knew the other's name, she had spoken to me with a directness that had even more firmly stamped on my memory her face as I had first seen it among the mangroves. On that terrible day when her father had gone out from the mission house to die, when dangers worse than death had threatened us from every side, she had cast her fortunes with Arnold's and with mine; in all the weeks of my pain and fever, she had tended me with a gentleness and thoughtfulness that had filled me with gratitude and something more. But now she would give me only a nod and a smile, with perhaps an occasional word!

Why, Arnold and even old Gideon North got more of her time and attention than did I. I would lie and watch her leaning on the rail, the wind playing with stray tendrils of her hair, which the sun turned to spun gold, and would suffer a loneliness even deeper than that which I felt when my own uncle, Seth Upham, died by the spring on the side of the hill. Could there be someone else of whom she was always thinking? Or something more intangible and deeper rooted? More and more I had feared it; now I believed it.

To see Cornelius Gleazen, his right arm still swathed in many bandages and his face as white almost as marble, eyeing me glumly from his place across the deck, was the only other shadow on my convalescence. With not a word for me,— or for my friends, for that matter,— he would stroll about the deck in sullen anger, for which no one could greatly blame him. He had no desire now to return to our home town of Topham; his bolt there was shot. We had refused him passage to the port of lawless men where no doubt he could have plotted to win back the brig and all that he had staked. Little grateful for the compromise by which he gained the privilege of landing on another continent, he kept company with his thoughts — ill company they were! — and with Matterson. But more than all else, it troubled me to see him watching Faith Parmenter.

As I would lie there, I would see him staring at her, unconscious that anyone was observing him. He would keep it up for hours at a time, until I did not see how she — or the others — could fail to notice it; yet apparently no one did notice it. The man, I now learned, and it surprised me, had a cat-like trick of dropping his eyes or looking quickly away.

As I grew stronger, I would now and then stand beside

her, and we would talk of one thing and another; but without fail there was the wall of reserve behind which I could not go. She was always courteous; she always welcomed me; yet she made her reserve so plain that I had no doubt that it was kindness alone which led her to put up with me. Only once in all that westward voyage did I feel that she accepted me as more than the most casual of acquaintances, and I could see, as I thought it over afterwards, that even then it was because I had taken her by surprise.

It came one night just when the sun was setting and the moon was rising. The shadows on deck were long and of a deep umber. The mellow light of early evening had washed the decks and all the lower rigging in a soft brown, while the topsails were still tinted with lavender and purple. We were running before a southeast wind and — though I incur the ridicule of old sailors by saying it — there was something singularly personal and friendly about the seas as they broke against our larboard quarter and swept by us one by one. I know that I have never forgotten that hour at the end of a fair day, with a fair wind blowing, with strange colors and pleasant shadows playing over an old brig, and with Faith Parmenter beside me leaning on the taffrail.

We had been talking of trivial things, with intervals of deep silence, as people will, especially in early evening, when the beauty of the great world almost takes away the power of speech. But at the end of a longer silence than any that had gone before it, as I watched her slim fingers moving noiselessly on the rail, I suddenly said, "Why do you never tell me about your own life? In all this time you have not let me know one thing about yourself."

As she looked up at me, there was a startled expression in her eyes.

"Do you," she said, "wish to know more about me?"

"Yes."

She looked away again as if in doubt; then, with a little gesture, which seemed for the time being to open a gate in that wall of reserve which had so completely shut her away from me, she smiled and spoke in a low, rather hurried voice.

"My story is quickly told. I was born in a little town in Dorset, and there I lived with my father and my mother and nurse, until I was sixteen years old. My mother died then. The years that followed were — lonely ones. It was no surprise to me — to anyone — when my father decided to give up his parish and sail for Africa. We all knew, of course, how bad things were on the West Coast. People said our English ships still kept up the wicked trade. But they were ships from Brazil and the West Indies, manned, I believe, by Spaniards and Portuguese, that gave us the most trouble. There were Englishmen and Americans now and then, but they were growing fewer. We thought we were done with them; then you came. Even after you had come, I told my father that you were not in the trade; but my father already had seen *him*," — she moved her hand ever so slightly in the direction of Gleazen, who likewise was leaning on the rail at a little distance,— "and he would believe no good of you. If only he could have lived! But you came. And here am I, with only you and an old black servant."

She looked up at me with a sudden gesture of confidence that made my heart leap.

"I am glad you came," she said.

Her hand lay on the rail beside mine, but so much smaller than mine that I almost laughed. She turned quickly with an answering smile, and impulsively I tried to cover her small hand with my larger one.

Deftly she moved her hand away. "Are you so silly?" she gravely asked.

At that moment I was quite too shy and awkward for my own peace of mind. She seemed suddenly to have stepped away from me as on seven-league boots. I certainly felt that she was angry with me, and I ventured no more familiarities; yet actually she merely moved her hand away and stayed where she was. There was that about her which made me feel like a child who is ashamed of being caught in some ridiculous game; and I think now that in some ways I was truly very much of a child.

For a long time we watched in silence the rolling seas, which had grown as black as jet save for the points of light that they reflected from the stars, and save for the broad bright path that led straight up to the full moon. But when the moon had risen higher and had cast its cold hard light on the deck of the brig, Cornelius Gleazen edged closer to us along the rail.

"Good-night," she murmured in a very low voice, and gave a little shudder, which, I divined, she intended that I should see. Then, with a quick, half-concealed smile, she left me.

All in all, I was happier that night than I had ever been before, I believe, for I thought that we had razed the wall of her reserve. But lo! in the morning it was there again, higher and more unyielding than ever; and more firmly than ever I was convinced that she had not told me *all* her story; that there was someone else of whom she was thinking, or that some other thing, of which I knew nothing, preyed upon her.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE DOOR OF DISASTER

ON the morning when we sighted land, I saw the big Fantee canoeman standing in the waist and looking with eager eyes at the distant shore. I suppose it was because I was still so weak that it did not thrill me as my first glimpse of Africa had thrilled me. We had known for some time that we were off the La Plata River by the changed color of the water; but the shores that we now saw were mere sandy beaches and low hills, which stretched, Captain North said, from Cape St. Mary up the river itself; and I, having somehow got the notion that I should see grand cliffs and mountains, was sadly disappointed in them.

At about nine o'clock in the morning of that first day we passed an island on which there were more seals than I had ever seen in any one place; and at about eleven we came to a small town, whence with light, fair winds we continued on our way up the river toward Montevideo.

For our venture into unfamiliar waters we could not have desired better weather than thus far prevailed; but about sunset the wind rose and a dense fog blew in; whereupon Captain North decided to haul off shore a few miles and anchor for the night, which we did about fifteen miles below the city. The wind, meanwhile, was rising to a gale. At eight o'clock, as it was still rapidly increasing, we paid out a considerable length of cable, and the Adventure rode with much less straining than before; but Captain North, I could see, was by no means well pleased with our situation, and as we went below to supper I overheard

him say to Matterson, who continued to hold the berth of chief mate, "Tend the cable with care, Mr. Matterson, and keep a good look-out."

Whatever Matterson's reply, I lost it; but to this day I remember his giant figure as he stood there on the quarter-deck, his jacket buttoned tight up to his throat, his arms folded, with the wind racing past his gray stubble of a beard. His strength was still impaired by his wound, although at last it had healed clean; but there was no sign of weakness in his bearing. In the dim light and the rising gale he loomed up big, bold, and defiant.

Small wonder that I remember him as he looked then! It was almost the last time I ever saw him.

We were five at the table that night,— Captain North, Gleazen, Arnold, Faith, and I,— and Abe Guptil served us as steward.

With Mr. Severance in his own quarters asleep during his watch below, and with the trader whom we had rescued sent unceremoniously forward to keep company with the cook, we should have had a pleasant time of it but for the presence of Gleazen, whose sullen scowl dampened every word we spoke. Why the fellow ate with us instead of waiting for Matterson, I am sure I do not know, unless it was sheer perversity. Not one of us had a word to say to him, yet there he sat, with his arm in a sling and the folds of bandages showing through his waistcoat as broad ridges, now glaring at Arnold, now eyeing Faith Parmenter; and his few words could have brought little comfort even to him.

"How she pitches!" Arnold exclaimed, as wine from his glass fell in a red blot on the cloth.

"This wind," said Gleazen gloomily, "puts me in mind of that little yell Seth Upham gave when they got him." His voice sank almost to a whisper.

Now, as the brig plunged, Abe Guptil stumbled while crossing the cabin and fell to his knees, yet made out by a desperate effort both to hold his tray upright and to keep the dishes from sliding off against the bulkhead.

"Bravo!" cried Gideon North.

"Yes, sir," Abe replied, brightly, "that was a clever one and I'm proud of it."

It had been impossible to teach him the manners of his new work, but we cared little about that.

"Hark!" said Faith. "What was the noise?"

"Nothing, so far as I know," Captain North replied. "How she pitches and jumps! Give me a ship under sail, steadied by the wind abeam."

"I've heard Bud O'Hara use them very words," said Gleazen.

Again silence followed the man's ill-chosen remark.

"When we have put our passengers ashore," Arnold began with a significant glance at Gleazen, "shall we —"

"Captain North!"

Matterson's light voice calling down the companionway brought the old mariner to his feet.

Gleazen, who had seemed to be on the point of making some ill-tempered retort, slumped back in his chair as Captain North rose.

"What will you have, Mr. Matterson?"

"I wish you'd come on deck, sir," came Matterson's reply. "I'm in doubt whether or no we're drifting."

"Drifting?"

The old man went up with haste, and I followed close at his heels.

"I don't like the feel of the lead," he remarked, when, after gaining the deck, he laid hands on the lead-line. "But what with the current of the river and our pitching, I can't be sure. Are those breakers to leeward?"

"I think, sir," Matterson replied, "that they are only the white tops of the waves."

Matterson showed more genuine deference now than I had ever seen in him before, which in itself went far to convince me that affairs were going badly.

"They may be," the old man replied, "but I'm inclined to doubt it." And with that he went aft over the stern into the boat.

Evidently the nearer view convinced him that they were indeed breakers, for he returned with surprising agility.

"Call 'em up, Joe," he hoarsely cried, "every living soul. We're in a bad way. You, Mr. Matterson, get ready another anchor and send men to clear the cable tier below. Quick now."

I heard those in the cabin start to their feet when I called, and a moment later Gleazen burst out and up the ladder. Behind him came Faith, whom he had passed in his rush to the deck; then, a moment later, Arnold, who had stopped to shake Mr. Severance out of a sound sleep.

The white crests were nearer now, and approaching at a startling speed. The roar alone told us they were breakers. A wave curled along the rail and a torrent of foam cascaded over the bulwark, washed the length of the deck, and eddied for a moment above the scuppers.

The breakers were upon us and all about us. Their deafening roar drowned out every sound in the brig. Then we struck. The man at the wheel was thrown to his knees, but held his place. One or two men succeeded in clinging to the rigging. The rest of us went tumbling up against the rail.

I really did not understand the expression on Gleazen's face. I simply could not yet comprehend the terrible danger in which we were placed. To me, being no sailor, any-

thing would have seemed possible at sea; but now, when we were so near port,— indeed, actually in sight of land, — it seemed utterly incredible that we could be in deadly peril. But it was a terrible lesson that put an end to my folly. A second blow followed the first shock of our striking, then a third still heavier, then a sea broke clean across our bows, carrying one poor wretch overboard and driving two more back to the quarter-deck. With a fearful, despairing yell the luckless fellow went past us and down, and as he did so I saw clinging to his shoulders a frightened animal and knew that we had seen the last of Pedro and his monkey.

The next sea broke over the whole weather side of the good Adventure, and only by clinging fast to the rigging did any one of us manage to retain his hold on the pounding wreck, which, desperate though her plight was, represented our one chance for life.

Now in a voice that rose above the roar of the tempest Gideon North thundered, "Cut away the masts! Cut away the masts!"

A lull followed, and for a moment we dared hope that, once the brig was freed of all weight aloft, she would right herself and go over the bar in such a way that we could let go our anchor on the farther side and so bring her up again into the wind. But the lull brought us only despair when the carpenter answered him by shrieking at the top of his voice, "The axe has gone overboard."

So swiftly and so mightily had the succession of seas burst over us that of all hands only ten or a dozen were left on board. I could see them in a line clinging precariously to the weather-rail. At first, in dazed horror, I thought Faith Parmenter was not there; then, seeing someone drag her back through the wash of the sea, I myself strove to reach her side. Another sea broke, and again

she almost went overboard; then I saw that it was Abe Guptil who was holding her with the strength of two men. Then the great black figure of the Fantee canoeman worked along the rail ahead of me and took a place beside her, opposite to Abe, and helped to hold her in the brig.

It was plain to every one of us what the outcome would have been had not a cross-current now thrown the pounding hull at a new angle, so that for a breathing-space those of us who were left alive had opportunity to take other measures for safety. But the very wave that did that also sent the masts by the board and, instead of lightening us, cluttered the decks with a hopeless snarl of ropes and canvas.

I was farther forward than the others, and so weak from my long illness that for a moment I could only strive to recover my strength and my breath. I saw them haul the filled boat up to the stern and, by sheer strength and audacity, raise her clear of the breakers, empty out half or two thirds of the water and let her go back again into the sea, where she rode sluggishly.

Into that rocking boat, first of all, sprang Matterson. Close after him scrambled the craven trader, and after him Neil Gleazen.

"Cast off!" I heard Matterson yell. "She'll founder with another soul aboard her."

And off they cast, those three men, abandoning every one of the rest of us to whatever end fate might hold in store.

That they should leave behind them those of us who had been from the first their enemies was not surprising; but that they should abandon thus, on a wreck that we all could see was doomed to break up in a few hours, if not literally in a few minutes, a girl who had done them no harm whatsoever, whose only fault lay in coming from

quite another world than theirs, was contemptible beyond belief, if for no other reason than that she was but a young girl and they strong men.

I would not have believed it of even them. I could scarcely believe my eyes when I saw them go. But as if to deal them a punishment more fitting than any that we could devise, while the brig was pounding in the breakers, a wave, sweeping clean over her, wrenched the trysail boom about and parted the sheet and flung the boom in a wide half-circle squarely on top of the boat, which it crushed to kindlings. Whether or not it hit any of the three cowardly knaves a direct blow, it left them struggling like so many rats in seas that speedily carried them out of our sight into the darkness.

No doubt we should have seen more of their fate had our own plight been less desperate; but the boom, as it swung down on the boat, raked across the taffrail, and those of us who had been clinging there in a long line, losing our hold on what up to that point had represented to us our only chance for safety, threw our arms round the boom and clung fast to that and with it were swept away from the wrecked brig, straight through the breakers that foamed between us and the shore. Holding the boom itself with one arm, I struggled to give Faith what help I could with the other; but we must both have been washed off the leaping spar, had not the big black Fantee canoeman, who all this time had been working closer and closer to his beloved mistress, plunged under the boom and, coming up on the farther side, seized both her and me with a grip like a gorilla's. Meanwhile Abe Guptil, as strong as a bear, in a flash had seen how effective the Fantee's manœuvre was, and had tried to duplicate it for himself, Arnold, and Gideon North, who had been washed to the farther end of the spar and nearly carried away from it.

But he only partly succeeded, for to him the water was not nearly so natural an element as to the mungo, and he began his attempt later and completed it more slowly.

Coming up on the far side of the boom, gasping and choking from a wave that struck him squarely in the face, he clasped hands with Arnold and tried to do so with Gideon North; but as his outstretched arm groped for him, the sea tore the old sailor away and we five were left alone on the long spar, two of us on one side and three on the other, with arms and bodies locked around it.

Brave Gideon North! There was little time then to feel his loss; but it was to grow upon us more and more and more in the weeks and months to come. Stout-hearted, downright, thoughtful, kind — it is very seldom that one gets or loses such a friend.

The spar rolled and turned as it swept toward the shore. Now we were pounded and battered and almost drowned by the breakers; now we got a chance to breathe and regain our strength as we came into deeper, quieter water; now we were swept again through breakers that tossed us, half drowned, into surging shallows. And so, holding fast to one another, we were cast up on the shore in the darkness, where we crawled away from the long waves that licked over the wet sand, and sat down and watched and waited and watched.

Twice we heard someone calling aloud, and once I was sure that I saw someone struggling toward us out of the surge. But though we staggered down to the sea and shouted time and again, we got no answer. Slowly the conviction forced itself upon us that we five and some half a dozen sailors who had reached land before us were all who were left alive of the passengers and crew of the brig Adventure; that after all there was no hope whatever for Gideon North, that bravest of master mariners.

To such an end had come Cornelius Gleazen's golden dreams! Through suffering and disaster, they had led him to the ultimate wreck of every hope; his own catastrophe had shattered the future of more than one innocent man, and had caused directly the death of many innocent men.

It was a wild dawn that broke upon us on that foreign shore. The wind raged and the sea thundered, and black, low clouds raced over our heads. To watch by daylight the terrible cauldron through which we had come by dark was in itself a fearful thing; and beyond it, barely visible through the surf, lay the broken hull of the Adventure. So far as we could discover, there was no living creature in all that waste of waters.

My dream of being a prosperous ship-owner lay wrecked beside the shattered timbers of the Adventure; and knowing that, after all my youthful dreams of affluence, I now was a poor man with my way in the world to make, I felt that still another dream, a dearer, more ambitious dream, likewise was shattered.

If when I owned the brig and had good prospects Faith Parmenter had withdrawn behind a wall of reserve, if there had been someone else whom she held in greater favor,— of whom she thought more often,— what hope that I could win her now? Starting to walk away from the others, I saw that she was ahead of me, staring with dark, tearless eyes at the stormy sea. I stopped beside her.

"I suppose the time of our parting is near at hand," I began. "If I can in any way be of service to you —"

"You are going to leave me *now? Here?*"

There was something in her breathless, anxious voice that brought my heart up into my throat.

"Not leave you, but —"

"But the time of parting has come?" she said, with a rising inflection. "It has found us in a wild and desolate

place,"— she smiled,— "more desolate and less wild than the place from which we sailed. You came to me strangely, sir; you go as strangely as you came."

"If I can be of any service to you," I blindly repeated, "I —"

Still smiling, she cut me short off. "I thank you, but I think I shall be able, after all, to make shift. If someone — Mr. Lamont, perhaps — will take me to some town where there is — an English church —"

She still was smiling, but her smile wavered.

Could she, I wondered with a sort of fierce eagerness, have told me *all* her story? Was there, then, really nothing hidden?

"If you,—" I began, "if I —"

Then she covered her face with her hands and sobbed, and for the first time I dared guess the truth.

At what I then said,— the words that opened the gate to the life we two have lived together,— she smiled so brightly through her tears, that for the moment I forgot the dark shore, the stormy seas, and the terrible, tragic night through which we had passed.

There was a wealth of affection in Arnold's kind, thoughtful face when we joined the others, and Abe Guptil and the big Fantee, Paul, smiled at us — it was good to see their smiles after the sufferings and sorrow that we all had passed through.

"If only Gideon North and Seth Upham were here now!" Abe cried.

"Poor Seth!" said Arnold. "What a price he has paid for one passionate blow."

"What do you know?" I demanded.

Arnold gravely turned. "I *know* little," he said. "But I have guessed much."

"What have you guessed?"

"They say in Topham that Neil Gleazen left town in the night and Eli Norton was found dead in the morning."

While he paused, we waited in silence.

"That, my friends, is why Gleazen for twenty years did not come back. But I once heard Gleazen say, when the mood was on him to torment Seth Upham, let people think what they would, that at least he — Gleazen — *knew* who killed Eli Norton."

"And you think that Seth Upham —"

He interrupted me with a Latin phrase — "De mortuis nil nisi bonum."

My poor uncle!

"You four," said Arnold thoughtfully, "will need money before you once more reach Topham."

"But of course you are coming too," I cried.

"No, I fear that I should not be content to live always in Topham."

Taken aback by his words, I stared at him with an amazement that was utterly incredulous.

"You are not coming back with us?"

"No." Arnold smiled kindly and perhaps a little sadly.

Unbuckling a belt that he had worn since I first knew him, he drew it off and opened it, and I saw to my further amazement that it was full of gold coins. "This," said he, "will go far to pay your expenses."

"I cannot take gold from you," I cried.

"Do not be foolish, Joe. We are old friends, you and I, and this by rights is as much yours as mine."

He thrust the belt into my hands. "It is all for you, but there is enough for our good friend Abe, in case he parts from you before reaching Topham."

"But you —"

"I have more. I am not, Joe, only that which I have pretended to be in your uncle's store in Topham, where you and I have had happy days together."

At my bewildered face, he smiled again.

"My real name, Joe, is old and not obscure. I am one of the least illustrious sons of my house; but I myself have served on the staff of the great Bonaparte.

"And that —" I could scarcely believe that honest Arnold Lamont was saying these astounding things.

"That is why it has been necessary — at least advisable — for me to conceal for so many years my identity. A man, Joe, does not tell all he knows."

CHAPTER XXXIV

AN OLD, OLD STORY

It was spring when we came back to Topham. The sun was warm upon the pleasant fields and gardens, and the blossoms on the fruit trees were thick and fragrant. The loveliest days of all the year were enfolding the pleasant countryside of New England in the glory and peace of their bright skies and soft colors; and as the hired coach that brought us down from Boston, with black Paul, at once proud and uncomfortable in a new suit of white man's clothes, seated stiffly high beside the driver, rolled along the familiar roads, I pointed out to my bride the fair scenes among which my boyhood had been spent.

From Montevideo, which we reached on the evening following the wreck,— there an old English clergyman married us,— we had sailed to New York as passengers in a merchant ship; but first we had taken leave of those two good friends, Arnold Lamont, whom we were never to see again, and Abe Guptil, who had bravely insisted on setting out to build anew his fortunes by shipping as second mate of an American bark then in port. From New York a second ship had given us passage to Boston, whence we came over the same road to Topham that I had traveled so long before with Arnold and Sim and Abe and Neil Gleazen and my uncle.

We ought, I suppose, to have been a properly anxious young couple, for of the great sum in gold that Arnold had so generously advanced us only a small part remained, and what I should do in Topham, now that Uncle Seth's store was in other hands, I had not the slightest notion. The

tower of golden dreams that poor Seth Upham had built in idle moments had fallen into dust; Neil Gleazen's unscrupulous quest had brought only ashes and bitterness; it was from the shadow of a great tragedy that we came into that golden morning in spring. But great as had been those things that Faith and I had lost, we had gained something so deep and so great that even then, when in discovering it we were so happy that the world seemed too good to be real, we had not more than begun to appreciate the wonder and magnitude of it.

Thus I came back to Topham after such a year and a half as few men have known, even though they have lived a full century — back to Topham, with all my golden prospects shattered by Gleazen's mad adventure, but with a treasure such that, if all the gold in the world had been mine, I would eagerly have given every coin to win it.

With my bride beside me, her hand upon my arm, I rode into sleepy little Topham, past my uncle's house where I had lived for many happy years, past the store where Arnold and poor Sim Muzzy and I had worked together, past the smithy where even now that old prophet, the blacksmith, was peering out to see who went by in the strange coach, and after all was failing to recognize me at the distance, so changed was I by all that had befallen me, up to the door of the very tavern where I had first seen Cornelius Gleazen.

There I handed my dear wife down from her seat in the coach, dressed in a simple gown and bonnet that became her charmingly, and turned and saw, waiting to greet me, the very landlord whom last I had seen reeling back from Gleazen's drunken thrust.

At first, when he looked at me, he showed that he was puzzled; then he recognized me and his face changed.

My fears lest the good man bear me a grudge for my

share, small though it was, in that villainous night's work, vanished there and then. "You!" he cried, with both hands outstretched; "why, Joe! why, Joe! We thought you were long since lost at sea or killed by buccaneers — such a story as Sim Muzzy told us!"

"Sim Muzzy?" I cried. "Not Sim!"

"Yes, Sim!"

Then I heard far down the road someone calling, and turned and saw — it was so good that I rubbed my eyes like a child waking from a dream! — actually saw Sim Muzzy come puffing and sweating along, with a cloud of dust trailing for a hundred yards behind him.

"Joe, Joe," he cried, "welcome home! Welcome home, Joe Woods!"

And as I am an honest man, he fell to blubbering on the spot.

"Things are not what they used to be," he managed at last to say. "The new man in the store don't like the town and the townspeople don't like him, and I've been living in hopes Seth Upham would come home and take it off his hands. But who is this has come back with you, Joe, and what's come of Seth Upham?"

At that I presented him to my wife, who received him with a sweet dignity that won his deepest regard on the spot; and then I told him the whole sad story of our adventures, or as much of it, at least, as I could cram into the few minutes that we stood by the road.

"And so," I concluded, "I have come back to Topham with not a penny to my name, save such few as are left from Arnold's bounty."

Sim heard me out in silence, for evidently his own trials had done much to cure him of his garrulity, and with a very sad face indeed he stood looking back over the

village where we had lived and worked so long together.

"Poor Seth Upham!" he said at last. "Well, there's nothing we can do for him now. And as for Neil Gleazen, he's better dead than back in Topham, for here he'd hang as sure as preaching. Jed Matthews, they say, never moved a muscle after Neil hit him on the head. But as for you, Joe, you're no penniless wanderer."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"There was all of fifteen thousand dollars on board the brig."

"What makes you think that?"

"Did n't I help Seth store it in his trunk? 'You're simple, Sim, and honest,' he says to me. 'I'll not have another soul besides you know this, but you're as honest as you are simple.' Them's the words he said, and I was that proud of 'em that I've treasured 'em ever since."

I thought of the papers and bags we had stored in the wagon that night when we fled from Topham.

"He hid it well," I replied. "But even if he had not hidden it so well, I fear that it would nevertheless be at the bottom of the La Plata River, just as it now is, with the brig, and all the goods that were on board her, and many men that sailed in her, good and bad alike."

"But that is not all."

"Not all? What do you mean?"

"Seth Upham left money in the bank, and I've seen his will with my own eyes. 'T was found in the safe after we left town, and turned over to Judge Fuller."

"But surely, what with buying the brig and taking all his papers, which I looked over myself in the cabin of the Adventure and which were lost, every one, when she broke up, he had nothing left. Why, the brig must have cost a pretty penny."

"That may well be, Joe, but there's money in the bank, for all that. Seth Upham had more money tucked away than most people would have believed."

I thought this over with growing wonder. "I do believe, my love," I said, "that we shall be able to make a fair start in the world after all, and, which is more, repay certain debts at once."

Faith smiled as she looked up at me; then she turned and looked at the quaint old town, which was spread before us in the sun.

CHAPTER XXXV

EHEU FUGACES !

Sim Muzzy's tale, when he bethought himself to tell it to us, was a lively one in its own way, although it did not, of course, compare with our African adventures. The press-gang that set upon us in Havana had rushed him away to a Spanish ship, where he was kicked about and cruelly abused, until, at peril of his life, he dropped overboard in the dark and swam to an American schooner, whose captain, hearing his story, took him on board and hid him in the chain-locker until they were well on their way to Boston. Thence Sim had set out on foot for Topham, where he had hired himself once again to tend the store and had led a dog's life ever since.

That Sim was right about Uncle Seth's bank accounts and his will, which left all to me, I learned before sunset that very day. The sums were not large in themselves, and taken all together they were small enough compared with the golden dreams my poor uncle had lived in; but they assured Faith and me of comfort at least; and when that evening I called upon the new storekeeper and found him so eager to escape from a town where his short measures and petty deceits had made him unpopular and discontented, that he was not in the mood to haggle over the bargain, I bought back the store on the spot.

"There'll be happier days ahead, Sim," said I when I came out.

"O Joe, I'm sure of that," he replied, his face bright with smiles; for he had overheard considerable of our discussion.

Within the week the papers were signed, and before a fortnight was up Faith and I went out, arm-in-arm, on the old hill road and saw the men break ground for the new house that we were to build.

Whether any of the others, unknown to Faith and me, had made their way ashore on the night of the wreck, we never learned; but it was virtually impossible that they should have done so without revealing themselves to those of us who had ranged all that bleak coast the next morning. For honest Gideon North we mourned as for one of the dearest of friends, and of the rest we thought sometimes in the years that followed. But none of them, except our own Abe, ever came to Topham, nor did I ever go back to the sea.

Three letters at long intervals brought us news of Arnold Lamont; and to the address that he gave in the first we sent with our reply a draft for the sum that he had so generously lent us when on that wild South American shore we four had set out to begin life anew. They were good letters, and there was no note of complaint in them; yet as I read them and thought of the Arnold Lamont whom I had known so long and, all things considered, so intimately, I could not but feel that in the cities of South America and, later, of Europe he failed, whatever compensations there may have been, to find anything like the peace and quiet happiness that he once had found in our New England town of Topham.

The week before the walls of our new house were raised, Faith and I drove together along a road that I had tramped on an autumn afternoon, to the farm where Abe Guptil had lived in the days that now seemed so long ago. We carried with us certain papers, which changed hands in the kitchen where Abe and his little family had slept the night when I was their guest; and so it happened that, when Abe

returned from his voyage and came to see me at the store full of honest joy at my good fortune, I sent him off to his own old home with the assurance that the terms by which he was to buy it were such that he need never fear again to lose it.

As the town of Topham has grown around us, Faith and I have grown into the town and with it; and although the black Fantee, Paul, who remained the most faithful of servants, was a nine days' wonder in the village, there now are few people left, I imagine, who know all the wild, well-nigh unbelievable, yet absolutely true, story of the year when we first met. A royal fortune may have been lost with Seth Upham and Neil Gleazen in Gleazen's mad quest, but I can say in all sincerity that from his quest I gained a fortune far beyond my deserts.

THE END

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